

THE STORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOL. II.

SEVENTEENTH AND EIGHTEENTH CENTURIES
1625-1780

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PREFACE

To add to the number of books dealing with English Literature would seem to be a bold and supererogatory undertaking. Few periods of that literature have failed to find competent exponents, few writers of note have failed to find their editors, their biographers, and their critics. Many of these studies have indeed been invaluable to the authors of the present volumes, and no doubt many echoes of them will be heard in their pages. But, while not posing for originality either in the materials used or in the opinions expressed, the authors hope that their work will be a stimulus to the young student, an encouraging guide to the older reader, a friendly help on the road to all those who earnestly desire to know our national literature. Particularly they hope that the book will be found useful by teachers who are engaged in giving life to the teaching of English Literature in schools. As a reviver of pleasant memories for themselves, and as a class-book for their pupils, which shall be trustworthy without being "stodgy," the work may not come entirely as an intruder.

It belongs to a series which is primarily intended for schools and colleges. The conception of the study of English Literature which is implied in the series is that the language and literature of a people illustrate the growth of their insight into the beauty and

the mystery of life and nature, that it is more truly a study of movements, ideas, and ideals, and of the men who have given memorable expression to them, than of the mere words in which they have been expressed, and that the teacher of English, therefore, attains his end only in so far as he has succeeded in exciting a prejudice on the part of his pupils for those authors who are of greatest significance and most enduring influence.

The authors believe that this can only be done by the historical method of studying English Literature. This method should, therefore, in their opinion, be introduced in the course of school-life, just as the systematic teaching of History is introduced there. It is, as experience has shown them, the interesting method, it gives a fuller life and a greater significance to books like the *Faerie Queene*, to men like Philip Sidney or Ben Jonson, even to the giants of literature like Shakespeare and Milton, and it brings before the student's mind the constant appeal to high standards of criticism. From the first he is stimulated to examine and to consider, to form judgments on what he reads, to seek deeper and wider canons of taste than the whim of the moment. We would not have him a precocious virtuoso, yet we would have him fall into the habit of referring his reading to the unimpassioned tribunal of literary history. The successful student of Literature is he who is best able to perceive in what he reads that which is permanent in thought and feeling.

By means of a continuous story of English Literature, aided by suitable volumes of illustrative reading matter, the authors hope to achieve their end of interesting students in the organic realities of Literature, of disclosing the nerves which conduct the nation's intellectual impulses from one generation to the next. They seek to represent the great personages as men, to narrate such incidents as weigh in

the consideration of their character, and to lay bare the plot of the great intellectual drama which is English Literature

The present volume takes up the story with the decadent drama, and leads it on to the eve of the new Romantic Movement. The crisp unity of our previous period is not so easily attainable here, our great ones are occupied in a variety of ways, and the spirit of the time is changeful and uncertain. Yet we note how colour and luxuriance of description apparently cease to be sought. Poets and prosemen alike are occupied with the study of form. Not Dryden and Pope only, but Milton, Herrick, and Gray are great stylists. The connecting principle of the volume would thus seem to be this endeavour towards perfection of form. The years may be denominated the age of style, wedged in between two periods of Romance when matter was too exuberant to allow of a too nice attention to form.

E W E

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THE STORY OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

VOL II

CHAPTER I

Close of the Elizabethan Drama

The Struggle for Political and Religious Freedom Political and Religious Declamation favour the Employment of Prose The Decadence of the Elizabethan Drama Philip Massinger John Ford James Shirley Reasons for the Decay of the Drama Closing of the Theatres

- 1616 Shakespeare died
 - 1625 John Fletcher died
 - 1637 Ben Jonson died
 - 1642 The Theatres closed by Parliament
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- 1620 Massinger's *Duke of Milan* acted
 - 1633 Ford's *The Broken Heart*
 - 1634 Shirley's Masque, *The Triumph of Peace*

1 Puritan England—When Charles the First succeeded to the throne as the second of the Stuart kings, the new temper of the people was already disclosed His father discovered early in his reign that his subjects were not likely to give to him that worship which, in spite of her wilful and autocratic temper as ruler, they had always given to Elizabeth as the personification of their ideal The glamour of the days of Elizabeth no longer held the eyes of the nation Men's thoughts were turned inwards, and were fixed upon more serious subjects than those of love and versification, or of the drama or the pageant, theirs it was to engage in a life-and-death struggle for the liberty of the people, for the right of self-government, for the determination of the constitution, for freedom of thought in matters of religion

2 CLOSE OF THE ELIZABETHAN DRAMA

These were times for hard thinking and yet harder fighting, for stern, purposeful speech, for the clanging of the sword, for desperate sacrifices. In the literature which such an age produced we shall expect to find echoes of the furious political struggle in which the people are engaged, but much that we shall study will be found to have a strange aloofness from the times, and to flow from the pens of men who lived almost apart and alone, men who, in their retreats, seemed to be entirely unaware of the hurrying feet of those who marched to battle hard by, or of the ceaseless debates which were held alike in the House of Parliament, in the capital city, and in every place of public or private resort throughout the land. Such a period, too, was not one in which men's thoughts were likely to be expressed in verse, prose must be the vehicle of thought, and, though it must not be suggested that an age which produced a lyricist like Herrick, or music such as Milton's organ tones, was not remarkable for its poetry, it is true that we are entering upon a prosaic rather than a poetic period. The theologian and the preacher, the historian and the philosopher, the politician and the moralist, are the great literary producers of the times.

2 The Decline of the Drama—Charles came to the throne in the year 1625. Shakespeare and Beaumont had already been dead nine years. Bacon was still living, but died the next year. Ben Jonson was fifty years old, and already in senile decay. Chapman, Marston, Dekker, Heywood, and Webster still lived, but nothing they were yet to write had any quality to lift it into worthy comparison with the work of the age of splendour into which they were born, and whose relics they were. The brilliant lights of the Elizabethan era were quickly dimmed in James's reign, and had almost without exception died out ere his son took his place on the throne. With the death of Shakespeare the Eliza-

bethan drama—its splendour all its own, and unsurpassed in the world's literature—fell into a rapid decline, and fast hastened to its death. The theatre remained, and was still the habitual resort of playgoers, but the taste was depraved, and the play-writers who still wrote gave themselves only too readily to the production of dramas whose quality did not always rise even to the low level of the taste of those who came to witness them. The scenes depicted lacked reality, if comedy was the aim, that which was produced had in it the burlesque and the farce but none of the sparkling wit and pleasing humour of the great masters, if the scenes were tragic, they had in them blood-curdling horrors pitilessly and by no means necessarily introduced, the plots moved about the baser passions of man, and, though often very skilfully developed, revealed but little appreciation of the higher moralities,—no feeling for the eternal truths which are the foundation of lofty and noble character, or out of which spring man's worthiest motives for action. Three dramatic writers, and only three, need detain us at this stage. These are Philip Massinger, John Ford, and James Shirley.

3 Philip Massinger (1584-1640)—Born in 1584, Philip Massinger was nineteen years younger than Shakespeare, and ten years younger than Ben Jonson. He was entered as a commoner at Oxford, but quitted the university abruptly in the year 1606, probably owing to the withdrawal of the favour of his patron, the Earl of Pembroke, because he "gave his mind more to poetry and romances than to logic and philosophy, as he ought to have done, as he was patronised to that end." Already famous for his wit, he came to London and betook himself to writing plays. The English drama was in the full tide of its glory, Shakespeare was producing his great tragic masterpieces, Jonson, Chapman, and Dekker were at their best, Beaumont and Fletcher were embarking upon

their great dramatic career. It would seem that for years Massinger lived in great poverty, and his first literary work was confined to partnership with other playwrights, or to the recasting of old and disused plays. The best of his plays written in partnership is *The Virgin Martyr*, in which he joined with Dekker, and which was issued in 1622. In the previous year he produced a comedy, *The Woman's Plot*, which was performed at court, and probably a year before this the earliest of his plays entirely by his own hand was first acted, though it was not published until the year 1623. This was *The Duke of Milan*, a tragedy of great power, though it is marred by the defects which mark all his writings. We may briefly mention among others of his plays, *The Bondman* (1624), *The Renegado* (1624), *The Roman Actor* (1626), "the most perfect birth of my Minerva," *A Maid of Honour* (1632), and *A New Way to Pay Old Debts* (1633). He lived on till 1640, and was found one morning dead in his bed at Southwark.

In his best work Massinger is really very far from the actual state of decadence, but even there the poetic flashes and inspired touches which illuminate the plays of Webster, Dekker, and Middleton are very rare, his style is too rhetorical, his verse differs little from mere prose, it lacks distinction and force, it is plain, unimpassioned, wanting in those lyric outbursts which distinguish his predecessors. Yet there are qualities of outstanding goodness in his work. His plots are constructed with infinite skill, and reveal the hand of a master of stage-craft, he displays great earnestness and a depth of religious feeling which has something of the austerity of Roman Catholicism, whilst there is an almost Puritanical desire to teach the moral lessons which he is ever ready to draw from his aptly chosen subjects. Fortitude in religion, endurance in right, self-punished tyranny, self-sacrifice in woman, the conquest of

passion in man—such are his themes. He takes a profoundly moral and philosophical view of life and human nature, and has a strong conviction of the supremacy of the moral law.

Massinger fails chiefly in want of power in characterisation, his characters act too much under *one* ruling impulse, they are not men of mixed motives. They fail to convince us, they are not real men and women, but mere stage puppets. He fails signally when he would present them under the sway of the great emotions in moments of profound passion or of strenuous action. Moreover, he gives too great a place to his leading character or characters, and fails sufficiently to work up the secondary characters in his plays.

An industrious playwright, a worthy and honourable man, a serious thinker, a high-toned moralist, an admirable story-teller, and a genius in dramatic construction, Massinger nevertheless is a true decadent. Eloquent, he is without passion, a facile versifier, he is without imagination, a careful student of men and a close observer of his times, his pictures lack vividness, and his dramas are wanting in movement and life.

4 John Ford (1586? 1656) — John Ford represents quite another side of the decadent spirit from Massinger. In the selection of his subjects he exhibits too great fondness for those that bear on the unreal, and are based upon blood-curdling horror. In the construction of his plots he exhibits no such skill as Massinger; he has no ingenuity, no inventiveness, by which to make of his plays complete wholes. He was born in Devonshire in 1586, and came to London at an early age to read for the Law. During the years of his London life he assisted in the composition of many plays, apparently rather as a pastime than in downright earnestness as a playwright. He seems to have taken pride in the fact that he did not write for gain. It

was not until late in life that he produced those plays which, written entirely by his own hand, give him his claim upon our attention. *The Lover's Melancholy*, a tragi-comedy, was first acted in 1628. Three great tragedies, *'Tis Pity*, *The Broken Heart*, and *Love's Sacrifice*, followed in 1633, and *Perkin Warbeck*, a historical play, in the year following. To these five plays we confine our attention. *The Lover's Melancholy* has more pathos and less of horror than Ford's later work. On the whole, it is more pleasing, too, the plot being worked up to a harmonious climax in the last scene, in which Melinda is restored to reason by the recovery of his daughter Eroclea. But the play shares with its fellows its monotony and gloom. Yet it contains what is perhaps Ford's highest flight into the realm of pure poetry in Menaphon's relation of the story of the fair-faced youth whom he met in the woods.

A sound of music touched mine ears, or rather
Indeed entranced my soul. As I stole nearer,
Invited by the melody, I saw
This youth, this fair-faced youth, upon his lute,
With strains of strange variety and harmony
Proclaiming, as it seemed, so bold a challenge
To the clear quisters of the woods, the birds,
That, as they flocked about him, all stood silent,
Wondering at what they heard.

A nightingale charged the lutanist to equal her if he could, in the purity of her music. Whereupon he played with such rapture that

* The bird, ordained to be
Music's first martyr, strove to imitate
These several sounds, which when her warbling throat
Failed in, for grief down dropped she on his lute,
And brake her heart. It was the quaintest sadness,
To see the conqueror upon her hearse
To weep a funeral elegy of tears,
That, trust me, my Amethus, I could chide
Mine own unmanly weakness, that made me
A fellow-mourner with him.

In his next play, *'Tis Pity*, we have very powerful scenes, but a most repulsive plot. Ford here reveals his great power as a dramatist of passion. He is a master of the art of analysing the human heart, but he concentrates the full tragic intensity of his genius upon an examination of its baser elements, and deals with motives unnatural, unholy, and abhorrent to a healthy mind. Yet his portraiture of Giovanni and his sister Annabella is matchless for its subtlety. It grips us, too, with the intensity of its passion. *The Broken Heart* is undoubtedly Ford's masterpiece, as it is the last great romantic tragedy of the period. It presents its author at his best, too, in the constructive art of the dramatist. In the development of his plot the author places before us a series of scenes which move us by their sadness until, by the added effects of these, we are brought to the heart-breaking agony of the concluding scene. The whole play is one long-drawn note of sadness, it is a tragedy of sorrow rather than of passion.

Into *Love's Sacrifice* Ford has again put much excellent work, but the play is marred by the unhealthiness of its subject and its feeble conclusion. In *Perkin Warbeck* he produced a play worthy to be thought of alongside *Edward the Second*, *King John*, and *Edward the Third*. The picture of Henry the Seventh, got from Bacon's history of that monarch's reign, was a very difficult one to present fairly in the reign of James the First, or Charles the First, but Ford has managed it very skilfully. Warbeck, too, was no easy study, but the dramatist has succeeded in presenting the impostor without allowing Warbeck to confess his imposture. The play also contains the poet's only comic success in the Lord Mayor of Cork, John-a-Water.

Ford's poetry runs smoothly, he is a great word artist, and there is oftentimes a subtle music in his lines. He has great intellectual power, and displays

deep moral passion. But he too often allows his faculty for analysis and predilection for abstract thought to overmaster him. Few poets have carried a heart so heavy-laden with sorrow, Ford is *par excellence* the poet of the Broken Heart. He has no humour, his comic scenes are unrelieved grossness. His dramas touch us, they deeply affect us, but they do not exercise a salutary influence over our spirits. 'Twas a decadent age, surely, whose people could receive with any show of pleasure or of satisfaction such plays in their theatres as these. Within a year or two of Ford's death, the Long Parliament ordered the theatres to be closed. The art expended upon the dramas presented in them had no correspondence with the spirit of the age.

5 **James Shirley (1596-1666)**—One dramatist remains for mention—James Shirley. He was a writer of great fertility and inventive power, and his figure worthily brings the period of the great Elizabethan drama to a close. He stands in complete contrast with Ford, seeking no unnatural situation by which to form his tragedy, nor permitting his comedy to become coarse or obscene. He writes with astonishing evenness and with no little grace. His plots, if not exactly original, are at least worked out with great skill, some of them display great ingenuity, and all of them interest. His moral purpose links him closely to Massinger. His first play, *Love's Tricks*, was licensed in 1625, and was very popular. His first printed play was the comedy of *The Wedding* (1629) it placed him in the front rank of the few remaining dramatists. In his verse he displays much feeling for the poetically picturesque, he has humour, and his wit in dialogue links him with the post-Restoration drama, as does also the subordination of character and plot to incident. His talents were great, his industry greater, he knew exactly how to hit the popular taste. As a writer of masques he also

merited distinction He was a devoted Royalist, and to him the Inns of Court entrusted the preparation of the *Triumph of Peace*, which was produced before the king and queen in 1634 He had no mean power as a lyricist Take the following hymn as a specimen of his power in this respect

O fly, my soul ! what hangs upon
Thy drooping wings
And weighs them down
With love of gaudy mortal things ?

The sun is now i' the east each shade
As he doth rise
Is shorter made,
That earth may lessen to our eyes

O be not careless, then, and play
Until the star of peace
Hide all his beams in dark recess !
Poor pilgrims needs must lose their way,
When all the shadows do increase

6 Final Eclipse of the Drama—Shirley lived on until the catastrophe of the Great Fire of London in 1666, but the demand for his plays ceased with the closing of the theatres by command of Parliament in 1642 The great Elizabethan drama had by that time entirely spent its force It was no longer demanded by the people of England, and the causes of the failure of their demand may be summarised as twofold The demand failed on the one hand because the play-writers themselves failed to produce that which breathed the genuine spirit of life and health The early Elizabethan dramatists wrote with unparalleled ability out of a full knowledge and deep appreciation of those incidents and types of character which belonged truly to the land and her people There was variety in their modes of expression, their verses were not those of facile

versifiers whose lines followed each other uniformly and monotonously. Their utterance rose and fell with the risings and the fallings of the spirit to which they gave outward form and expression. But the great masters left behind them well-defined lines upon which their successors built up their plays, and established principles and a tradition for which the audiences trained by them looked, in new plays presented to them. Thus certain favourite social types became stereotyped, *e.g.*, the decayed country gentleman and the country gull. The theatres became more and more the exclusive resort of the hangers-on of a court less pure and more depraved in taste than that of the great Elizabeth, the poets who made new dramas for these new-fashioned audiences insensibly drooped to the lower level of taste. The life of the country became less and less congenial to the dramatists. Jonson, Fletcher, and Massinger did not know the country. They only felt the attractions and interests of town life. Drunkenness, gambling, frivolity, effeminacy in dress, were the prevalent vices of those who came to see their plays, add to this, coarseness of manners and language, the general absence of culture or even of the rudiments of education, and the lax morality of the female sex, and the path of decadence is plainly marked out before us. Moreover, as the poets themselves became more skilled in the arts of versification, they lost originality of conception and ingenuity in plot-construction, their plays either presented stock situations and familiar motives, or were based upon forced situations and introduced unnatural or even unreal themes, so that they tended either to the monotony of repetition or to extravagance and unhealthiness of tone. On the other hand, another trend of circumstances set in which led irresistibly to the suppression of the theatres, and consequently to the extinction of those

who would practise the dramatic arts. The mass of the people, as Charles and his immediate courtiers became more extravagant in their demands for the king's personal rule, became more solidly united against the court, and in consequence against those things in which the court took its pleasures. The spirit, now rising to full flood, found its nourishment in the sacred Word of God, which "is to be handled reverently, gravely, and sagely, with veneration to the glorious majesty of God which shineth thereon, and not scoffingly, floutingly, and jibingly, as it is upon stages in plays and interludes, without any reverence, worship, or veneration to the same." Thus, and in terms yet stronger, Philip Stubbs had attacked the stage as early as 1583. Sidney's *Apologie*, followed by the lofty drama of Shakespeare and his best contemporaries, kept the Puritans' instinctive hostility to the theatre for a while silent. But the opposition thus early indicated gathered strength and again emerged in numerous pamphlets in the generation that followed, and came to a head in Prynne's famous *Histriomastix*, which was issued in 1632. Thenceforward, the court circle and the Puritans became more and more widely divided with respect to theatrical performance, until in 1642 Puritanism finally triumphed in the issue of the Ordinances of the Lords and Commons of that year, that "public stage plays shall cease to be forborne." Here our study of the English drama is suspended for a while. The great Elizabethan succession is closed, and when at the Restoration once more the theatres are opened, we shall find plays presented to their audiences breathing another air, constructed in conformity with new, and, unhappily, lower ideals, with their good qualities, it is true, but with faint remembrance in them of the glories of the great age in which "giants were in the land."

CHAPTER II

Caroline Poetry

John Donne Donne's Poetry and Influence Influence of
Jonson and Spenser Social Cleavages reflected in
Literature Religious Poets Quarles, Wither, Herbert,
Crashaw, and Vaughan The Cavalier Lyrists Herrick,
Carew, Suckling, and Lovelace Transition

1633	Herbert's <i>The Temple</i>
1634	Wither's <i>Emblems, Ancient and Modern</i>
1635	Quarles' <i>Divine Emblems</i>
1646	Crashaw's <i>Steps to the Temple</i>
1648	Herrick's <i>Hesperides</i>
1650-5	Vaughan's <i>Silex Scintillans</i>

1 John Donne (1573-1631) — No poet perhaps exerted a greater influence upon his immediate successors than John Donne. Although the greater part of his poetry was written ere Elizabeth died, its spirit and variety of form are quite different from anything else written at the same time, and make Donne the foremost in time, as he is also in importance, of those who marked the beginning of a new order. He was born in London in 1573, his father being a prosperous merchant. He studied at Oxford and at Cambridge, and read law at Lincoln's Inn. He gave himself in his youth to dissipation, and, it is to be feared, dissoluteness of life. He took part in Essex's expedition to Cadiz, and on his return became secretary to

the Lord Cowper In this early portion of his life he wrote the greater part of his most characteristic poetry, though for many years it was handed about in manuscript only That it should have exerted so great an influence under such circumstances upon those who read it, and especially upon those who were themselves engaged in writing poetry, bespeaks remarkable qualities in the work But Donne fell in love with Lord Cowper's daughter, and, as her father would not consent to the union, they were secretly married, with the result that Donne was dismissed and for a time imprisoned Forgiven and released, he lived in poverty in London, though with well-founded hopes of preferment by the favour of one or other of his numerous friends at Court He now evinced strong theological leanings, but, as he said, out of shame for the dissipation of his youth, he was not easily persuaded to take holy orders Indeed, it was not until James expressly desired him to do so, and at the same time expressly refused otherwise to find office for him, that in 1615 he was ordained James at once made him his chaplain, and five years later made him Dean of St Paul's, by which, with other preferments, he reached considerable affluence He was one of the most popular preachers of his time, and his eloquence, earnestness, and emotional power in preaching justly entitled him to his fame He died in 1631

Donne's early poetry consists chiefly of amatory verse, in much of which he allows himself the widest license Were it not for the quaint and far-fetched conceits, and the mystic sense that pervades them, many of these poems would not have outlived the generation that could permit such erotic effusions to be circulated in its midst Later came the marriage songs, verse epistles, elegies, and graver and more philosophic poems, such as *Progress of the Soul*. To the period of his old

tion belong the divine poems, including his paraphrase of the *Lamentations of Jeremiah*. Donne's poetry, it must be frankly said, is oftentimes unintelligible, but it never fails to impress the reader with the philosophic reach of the poet's imagination, even when it is least understood. At the same time, it throbs with emotion. In no poet of his time, and in but few since his day, do we find so perfect a union of intellect with emotion. Donne took great liberties, and often with great success, with his metres. His predecessors had not dared so boldly to break from the Spenserian verse and the well-established metrical forms adopted in the dramas. But Donne scarcely wrote two consecutive poems in the same, or anything like the same, metre. In his later work he grew strangely melancholy, he became close neighbour in thought to the graveyard, and delighted chiefly to dwell on aspects of death, which he painted with a gorgeousness and majesty all his own. To sum up Donne's characteristics, we find in him great analytical and dialectical skill, a wilful disregard of the metrical traditions handed down by his predecessors, great inventiveness of metres, remarkable power of abstraction, a disposition to excess of subjectivity in thought, intense passion transformed by his powerful mind into terms of intellect. His subjectivity, especially as it was developed in his later religious poems, gave its influence to such poets as George Herbert, Francis Quarles, Richard Crashaw, and George Wither, the chief of the religious poets who succeeded him.

This metaphysical turn which Donne gave to poetry was not the only influence operating upon the early Stuart poets, Spenser's work was still pregnant, and Ben Jonson almost held a dictator's throne among the wits of his day. It was the fault of Spenser's poetry to make highly elaborated pictorial representations of the scenes he

described, and of the persons appearing in those scenes, his canvas was large, it presented the work of a hand moved by remarkable feeling for sensuous beauty, and well skilled in the art of presenting the same. His verse rolled on always with great smoothness, and had much melody in it. The story unfolded itself naturally, and went on from incident to incident with a continuousness that seemed capable of being drawn out indefinitely. Though so sweet and melodious, the song yet tended from its evenness to become monotonous and wearisome to the reader. Its length was a matter of no concern to the poet. With Ben Jonson, on the other hand, there was a much closer concentration upon the subject. The whole was related to its parts and the parts to the whole. Brevity and conciseness of expression were consciously aimed at by the poet, there was little of Spenser's florid style in Ben's lyrics, his delivery was always well under control, his style was chaste though not unadorned, his utterance quite easy and natural nevertheless. Spenser sought beauty in romance and passion, Jonson sought beauty with as ardent a soul, but he expected to find her in the guise of perfect verse form, in studied excellence both found a poet's joy in beauty, but Spenser by purely objective search, Jonson by the exercise of the more purely artistic faculty. Donne, as we have seen, was unlike both, though he, too, loved beauty and extolled her, in a manner all his own. His passion was no less strong than Spenser's and Jonson's, but it found expression in imagery and speech strange to the manner of his day. The influence of Spenser is chiefly to be traced in the early work of Milton, that of Donne chiefly in the religious poets of the period, though hardly less also in those other poets of the day over whom Jonson's influence was greatest, viz, the numerous band of lyrists and cavalier poets—Thomas Carew, Robert Herrick, Suckling, Love-

lace, to mention but a few Here there was no great originality, little of inspiration, but there was a remarkable knack of exquisite workmanship which distinguished equally the *Litany* of Herrick and the ribald singing of Suckling There is also an abundance of pretty conceits and odd turns of thought, which become beautiful imagery in such a song as Lovelace's

Tell me not, Sweet, I am unkind,
That from the nunnery
Of thy chaste breast and quiet mind,
To war and arms I fly

But in the songs of the religious writers they become strained and fantastical, occasionally sublime, as in Vaughan's

I saw Eternity the other night,
Like a great ring of pure and endless light,
All calm as it was bright
And round beneath it, Time, in hours, days, years,
Driven by the spheres,
Like a vast shadow moved, in which the World
And all her train were hurld

Donne's was a powerful mind, as dominant in the metaphysical as Ben Jonson's was in the intellectual side of poetry In seriousness and depth an Elizabethan, in the artificial and essentially unpoetic nature of his verses he was a true poet of a decadent age In his case, as in Ben Jonson's, inspiration has largely given place to cleverness and learning

2 Social Cleavages reflected in Literature—In our study of the poets whose work practically coincides with the period of the reign of Charles the First, it will not be difficult to discover the division of social thought and feeling which became so plainly marked in his reign The unity of impulse and movement in a single well-defined course which characterises

the literature of the Elizabethan period, gives place to divided schools representing men of widely differing social, political, and religious thought. The courtly wit contrasts with the grave Puritan, the gay man of the world with the pious recluse, the dissolute roysterer with the man of piety and decorum. These poets, taken together, gave forth a volume of poetry which, from its crystal purity of verse-tone, is entitled to a place of high honour in any volume of English lyrical verse. The Elizabethan lyric spent itself principally on love-themes, and often became in the highest degree artificial. It cannot compare for beauty or sincerity with the songs we are now to consider. The times of Charles the First were distracted by the throes of a great turmoil. There was no time for the calm architecture of a poem like the *Faerie Queene*. Men could only write in snatches, could only pen poems now and then—a hymn or an elegy, a gallant love-lyric, or a bacchanalian frolic, according to the mood of the writer. But poems thus produced had all the essential qualities of the true lyric. These are a simplicity of theme—generally personal, singleness of aim—the treatment of a single thought, feeling, or situation, a fine sensitiveness to rhythm, demanding perfect mastery of verse form and complete control of the music of speech. Bearing all these essentials in mind, we shall find great examples of lyric poets singing their sweet songs amid the din of war and the strife of tongues which occupied this period of political, civil, and religious division. Our poets fall into two well-marked divisions—the religious lyrists and the poets of courtly wit.

•3 Religious Poets—The first of these is Francis Quarles (1592-1644), in whom we have a quaint survival of the mediæval spirit. A mere list of the titles of his works, still more a perusal of their contents, would lead us to imagine Quarles to have been a religious recluse or a learned divine. Yet the man

who wrote a *Feast for Wormes*, set forth in a poem of a *History of Jona*, a *History of Queen Ester*, *Job Militant*, *Sion's Elegies*, and *Divine Emblems*, was a busy man of the world, holding important public posts, and an impassioned Royalist. He wrote prodigiously, and much of his poetry consists of jogging, jingling couplets wanting in imagination and in dignity. Yet he has a real power as a poet, and possesses genuine wit. His conceits are often quaint in the extreme. In his allegorical verse we find an excess of metaphor, image is piled on image in illustration of his thought, a feature common to his nearest successors, Herbert, Crashaw, and Vaughan.

Like Quarles, George Wither (1588-1667) wrote voluminously, but the best of all his work was collected and printed in his *Juvenilia* in 1622. The next year, he issued his *Hymns and Songs of the Church*, the *Psalms of David* appeared in 1632, and the *Emblems Ancient and Modern* in 1635. Before his death, his poetry had fallen into disrepute followed by oblivion, chiefly on account of the degeneracy of his latest work. It remained for the critics of the early years of the nineteenth century, especially Charles Lamb, to discover the exquisite sweetness of this singer so long forgotten and unknown. His fancy ranged the hillside and the plain, and dwelt beneath the rustling shades of the covert or by the gently flowing stream. In his pastoral pieces, his skill and faithfulness in presenting the beauties of nature discover his kinship with his poet-friend, William Browne, and with him testifies to the influence of Spenser. The same lyric sweetness is combined with great tenderness and piety of spirit in the best of his religious poetry. But another demands our closer attention when we again make mention of devotional song.

Among the religious poets of the seventeenth

century **George Herbert (1593-1633)** holds the first place. It would be interesting, had we the space, to trace his career as scholar, university don, and courtier; to inquire closely into family relationships, his social and professional ties, the manner of his intercourse with his friends and contemporaries. The friends that cluster close around this noble figure include the saintly Bishop Andrewes, the famous Donne, poet and popular preacher, Sir Henry Wotton, accomplished courtier and scholar, Nicholas Ferrar, saint, and the genial Izaak Walton. But let all this be told us rather by Walton himself in his incomparable story of the life of his friend. We need only observe that, judging by his education, scholarly attainments, and natural disposition to piety and holy living, those who knew him best never doubted that his true calling was the Church. Yet it was only after the death of King James and the consequent loss of his hope for great preferment that, after many conflicts with himself and his ambitious desires, he resolved to take holy orders. He was ordained priest, and received from King Charles the rectory of Bemerton in 1630. Within three years his saintly life had closed, yet those years sufficed him for the production of a book of poems and a short prose writing which are, in their particular way, hardly approached and not surpassed by any other English religious poet. It is difficult to say whether Herbert's poems exercise their powerful spell over us by reason of the indefinable charm of the sweet, sensitive, and saintly nature of the writer himself, or on their own account, and by reason of the grace and beauty, truth and light, in the verses themselves. Either reason suffices, and both apply with equal force.

Herbert's poetry chiefly consists of his work entitled *The Temple*, comprising the poems in which his soul pours out its praise of the Creator, or breaks into confessions of unworthiness and sin, and gives

utterance to its aspirations after the purest and holiest living. Never did piety sing so sweetly, or the yearnings of the human spirit for things spiritual and divine find such exalted expression. Herbert was a talented musician, and this artistic taste, combined with his poetic faculty, enabled him to produce verses of great lyrical felicity. It is only necessary to read some of his poems aloud, to discover their exquisite musical beauty. His poetry has all the richness of concert that belongs to his master, Donne, and oft-times much of its metaphysical vagueness. It has, too, a quaintness which is all its own. His imagery is often exquisitely beautiful, but sometimes he disappoints us with a strangely unfortunate simile, and offends us by a singularly unhappy term of expression. But we may not stint our praise of our poet. Never a gentler spirit nor more strenuous religious feeling found expression in English verse, never were man's spiritual experiences and pious emotions so variously expressed, never have holy things and places received so profoundly reverent a treatment, and never did the spirit of beauty and peace find sweeter or more perfect utterance.

Richard Crashaw (1613-49) and **Henry Vaughan (1622-95)** are true spiritual children of George Herbert. In both the pietistic spirit dwelt, both were gifted with the same wide command of metres, both proved themselves capable of producing verse of great musical beauty—indeed some of Crashaw's verse fitly compares with Milton's. Both alike indulged in quaintness of conceits. The work of both is at once adorned (and marred) by a wealth (or extravagance) of metaphors, both have a fondness for abstract subjects. Crashaw is undoubtedly the greater poet and master of words, his subtlety of thought and choiceness of expression sometimes smite us with the bewilderment of a flash of lightning, and this even when the poet is engaged upon his abstrusest subjects. But Vaughan

in his studies becomes harsh and discordant in note, he is very great in occasional snatches, such as that on page 16, his sweetest song is heard when he deals with some quite simple theme, and then it flows smoothly and with gentle rippling joyousness. The *Steps to the Temple* of the one, and the *Silex Scintillans* of the other, could ill be spared from the literature of the period, even though a George Herbert still remain.

4 **The Cavalier Lyrists**—The poets whose work has just been reviewed belong to and illustrate one main stream of tendency in English life and thought during their times. A deep seriousness possessed the mind of the people, the heart of the nation was stirred to its depths by ideals of personal freedom and civil government, which we to-day inherit as things realised by the struggles and self-sacrifice, the fierce debates and yet fiercer fights upon the battle-fields in which the compatriots of these poets engaged. But there were those in the land who did not partake of such grave seriousness as their fellows. Their hearts were always gay, their spirits blithe, their songs merry. From their pens, if they were poets, there flowed verse and songs, in which there remained much of the true Elizabethan spirit of free and spontaneous life and joy. In them there yet burned the old fire, on their lips was heard the same sweet music which we find in the poetry of Spenser, Shakespeare, and Jonson. In the cavaliers who thronged the court of Charles the First and flocked to his banners in the wars, there was many a gay heart that could sing, careless of life or threatened death, the love songs of Thomas Carew or Sir John Suckling, or in company, with the bowl in their midst, could troll the merry song of Robert Herrick or Richard Lovelace.

Of this phase of life and class of poetry, the work of **Robert Herrick** (1591-1633) is most typical. Born in London and educated at Cambridge, he had some

association, in his early years, with literary London, and sat with the wits that gathered around Ben Jonson. He easily established a reputation as a court wit, and his poems passed from hand to hand in manuscript, in accordance with the fashion of the time. Later, he took orders, and was appointed to a living in Devonshire. His life there did not bring him satisfaction. He thirsted for the pleasures and companionship of the city. Yet the beauties of nature, with which he was surrounded, appealed to his poetic imagination and gave him inspiration for much of his best poetry. He was ejected in 1648, and lived again in London until he was reinstated in 1662. His freedom from pastoral cares gave him opportunity to prepare for publication poems previously written. The volume was entitled *Hesperides*, and includes the *Noble Numbers* or Sacred Poems. This is the one book Herrick has bequeathed to us. Herrick's religious lyrics are remarkably beautiful and transparently sincere. The most familiar is the *Litany*, and it is also the best. Another poem almost equal to it is the *Thanksgiving*. Both these are masterpieces, and there is nothing quite like them for simplicity of expression in combination with the pious fear and absolute dependence upon God in simple trust. But his religious lyrics form only a part of Herrick's poetry, and, remarkable as it is, it is not the most distinguished. We must read his secular poems if we would know all his charm.

The title *Hesperides* is most aptly chosen. The name calls up to our vision a garden of enchantment in the West, a place where the air is filled with the delicate perfume of fragrant flowers, the eye feasted with their countless forms of grace, the ear ravished with the songs of singing birds, and the whole being pervaded with the sense of the joyousness and the frank innocence of life.

Herrick's poems fall into three well-marked divi-

sions 1 Those dealing with country life and pastoral scenes, 2 His poems of love, 3 His religious poems. The last have already been mentioned. His love poems, doubtless written during his early years in London, are the most numerous. Those of country life are obviously the fruit of his first years in his country parsonage in Devonshire. It is not difficult to discover the elements of Herrick's power so completely to charm his reader. As we move from poem to poem, we find a delightful and never-failing freshness about him, there is, moreover, frank and natural gaiety in his spirit, he is cheerful and gay, without the slightest suspicion of anything forced in his gaiety. He laughs merrily, and there is a healthy ring in his laughter, and a natural cheeriness in his voice. He paints true to nature, whatever appeals direct to the senses or to the simply human emotions, he describes in accents of simple sincerity. His choice of language exactly fits his subjects, his speech balances the simplicity and naturalness which marked his feelings, and the music of his verse keeps close harmony with the sense. In his versification there is that supreme art which hides the evidence of its workmanship, his metres fit naturally into the situation created by the thought or the emotion to which he gives expression. Everywhere there is a sense of ease in his work, no overstrain, no futile or noisy effort. At the same time, it must be observed that there is no great depth of passion about Herrick, none of the exquisite tenderness or heart-piercing pain such as some lyrists have. For all their perfection of lyrical art, and in spite of their grace and fidelity, his songs do not stir the more powerful emotions, or excite the deeper feelings. They give us simple and easy pleasure. They are the work of a man who had the epicurean's soul—of a jovial, hearty friend of all human delights—of one who was six days a pagan and one a Christian in

each week Some of the flowers in the *Hispanides* are not even fragrant, but disgusting, but there are *Corinna's Maying, Cherry Ripe, Fair Daffodils*, and so many more—how dripping with spring sunshine, how intoxicating with the fresh air that blows through them! "Let us eat, drink, and be merry, for to-morrow we die," is Herrick's reiterated thought Life is lovely to him—but oh! so quickly evanescent! This is the deepest feeling that Herrick ever excites it wings his sweetest lyrics with real pathos "Gather ye rosebuds while ye may!" Ofttimes this moralising note rises to the surface of his verse, as in the following example, which also exemplifies something of the poet's charm

Sweet, be not proud of those two eyes,
Which, starlike, sparkle in their skies,
Nor be you proud, that you can see
All hearts your captives—yours yet free.
Be you not proud of that rich hair
Which wantons with the love sick air
Whereas that ruby which you wear
Sunk from the tip of your soft ear,
Will last to be a precious stone,
When all your world of beauty's gone

Of the numerous gay courtier poets, of whom Herrick is the most distinguished example, we need only pause briefly to mention the writings of **Thomas Carew** (?1594-1639), **Sir John Suckling** (1609-42), and **Richard Lovelace** (1618-51) Carew wrote sparingly, but what he has given us places him in rank with Herrick for his mastery of lyrical form He has all Herrick's delicacy of touch, and what is more, a certain virile power which his companion in fame does not usually display. The following excites in us feelings which have real poignancy.

Oh gentle love, do not forsake the guide
Of my frail bark, on which the swelling tide
Of ruthless pride
Doth beat and threaten wrack from every side.

Gulfs of disdain do gape to overwhelm
 This boat, nigh sunk with grief, whilst at the helm
 Despair commands,
 And, round about, the shifting sands
 Of faithless love and false inconstancy,
 With rocks of cruelty,
 Stop up my passage to the neighbour lands.

But Carew lacks the freshness and the charm of warmth and simplicity which Herrick has. Moreover, as with Suckling and Lovelace, and others of the same time, his gaiety and humour are not wanting in suggestion of coarseness and license, there is the air of abandon, of desperate dare-devil living which, unfortunately, the gracious and religiously-framed spirit of Charles the First was powerless to subdue in many of those who composed his *entourage*. Suckling could on occasion write poems of playful fancy and sparkling wit, but his work is surprisingly uneven. The poetry of Lovelace, too, is very unequal. His personal beauty and gracious bearing made him "the top of admiration" among the court gallants. His ardour in support of the Royalists' cause brought him into prison at the hands of the Parliamentarians, and it was whilst in prison* that he composed his *Lines to Althea*, which will cause him for ever to be remembered for the stanza

Stone walls do not a prison make,
 Nor iron bars a cage,
 Minds innocent and quiet take
 That for an hermitage
 If I have freedom in my love,
 And in my soul am free,
 ●Angels alone, that soar above,
 Enjoy such liberty

Men like Lovelace and Suckling did not pretend to be poets. they wrote verses for their mistresses and took little heed of them after they had written them. They were courtiers—suffianly fighters and

heavy drinkers—fine gentlemen with a veneer of gallantry but few fine feelings. They recall to us the days when poetry was the courtier's glory, and remind us how far fallen we are in 1640 from "the spacious days of good Queen Bess."

4. Transition—The poetry of the reign of Charles the First (not including Milton's early poetical work, which is discussed in Chapter IV), has the changefulness of the time. Its general aim is uncertain, and lacks the target of a definite poetic aim such as the Elizabethans had. Whilst something of the spirit of the great Elizabethan period pervades their work, these writers obviously do not belong to that age, but stand by themselves. Times pass and manners change. Puritanism was gradually transforming the men of "merrie England" into men of seriousness and steadiness of deportment. The frank joyousness of life in the first impulse of the revival of classical learning, the romance which enveloped the lives of men whose minds dwelt upon chivalrous deeds in days past, and who emulated them in their own valorous exploits, had passed away never to return. Great and stirring times were to come, great and noble lives were yet to be lived, imperishable pages were yet to be written, but they were of another spirit, born of quite other emotions. The poetry we have here studied belongs to neither. In it we have the traces of the gradual passing away of the old, and the coming in of the new. What the new should prove to be, a later chapter must tell. Meanwhile, let us note that the poets of this chapter were all Royalists. Puritanism has first to produce its Pym and Cromwells, ere its Miltons have leisure to give it voice.

CHAPTER III

Seventeenth Century Prose—I

The Elizabethan Prose-writers left no Tradition The Seventeenth Century Prose-writers established pure Prose Form
"Character" Writing a Valuable Exercise Bishop Hall
Thomas Fuller Robert Burton Sir Thomas Browne
Jeremy Taylor Selden and others

- 1621 Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy*
- 1642 Taylor's *Episcopacy Asserted*
- 1643 Browne's *Religio Medici*
- 1646 Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (The Vulgar Errors)
- 1650 Taylor's *Holy Living*
- 1651 Taylor's *Holy Dying*
- 1658 Browne's *Urn Burial* and *The Garden of Cyrus*.
- 1662 Fuller's *Worthies* printed

1 **No Elizabethan Prose Tradition**—The Elizabethans bequeathed to their successors perfect models of poetry, dramatic and lyric alike, as a vehicle for the expression of human thought and emotion. The same cannot be said for them in respect of prose. Their experiments in prose-writing did little to determine laws, or to establish examples for their successors in that field. The euphuistic vein of Lyly could not be endured outside the heated atmosphere of the circle of Elizabeth, in which the fond conceits and flattering phrases of her courtiers were current. True, the "judicious Hooker" and Francis Bacon created for themselves by the unique force of their genius a prose style inimitable for their own

purposes Raleigh, too, occasionally found means of noble expression in prose. But with these exceptions, and that of the Bible of 1611—which to this day has qualities which make it an exception in the whole range of English literature—English prose had made little progress in its development. At the beginning of the seventeenth century, the time was yet to come when a writer of prose should submit himself to law and restraint with the same obedience and from the same necessity as governed his attempts to become a successful artist in verse. The literature of the seventeenth century has this peculiarity, that whilst its poetry declined greatly from the glories of the former age, and underwent disintegration which resulted in the emergence at the end of the century of a poet whose style and spirit were absolutely removed from those of the former time, prose steadily improved in form, in power, and in variety, and a prose style adequate for the expression of ordinary ideas had been developed—a style which an average man could acquire.

2 Character Writing—Early in the century a considerable number of literary men indulged in “character” writing, and in some degree this habit persisted throughout the century. In the fourth century Theophrastus had practised the art and set up examples of great excellence in descriptions of various types of character, remarkable for keenness of observation and accurate knowledge of life, as well as for the skill and vivacity of their expression. Towards the end of the seventeenth century, La Bruyère gave us, in his *Caractères*, other and more finished examples of this literary art. Probably the writers we are now considering were inspired by the example of Theophrastus, newly made known to them. The importance of their efforts lies in the fact that the exercise was a deliberate attempt to employ the medium of prose in the creation of pictures which

should accurately express the details of a preconceived and carefully-thought-out type of character, and should give to that character those graces and excellences which the writer desired his reader to admire, or reveal those weaknesses and vices which he would have him avoid. In the first half of our century the many writers of experiments of this kind included Joseph Hall, Sir Thomas Overbury, John Earle, George Herbert, and Thomas Fuller. The art expended upon these exercises had much to do with the development of those literary faculties which in the eighteenth century, gave us such immortal figures as that of Sir Roger De Coverley, and later still attained its highest excellence in the convincing characterisations of the great masters of fiction.

The vigour and independence of **Joseph Hall** (1574-1656), who became Bishop of Exeter (1627) and afterwards of Norwich (1641), are reflected in the vigour and directness of his writings. The chief of these are his *Meditations*, his *Contemplations on the New Testament*, and his remarkable series of *Characters of Virtues and Vices*. Like Hall, **Thomas Fuller** (1608-1661) was an eloquent churchman, and with him he shared the fortunes of the royal house to which he was so ardently attached. His *Holy State* (1642) won great popularity, its racy "characters" exactly suiting the humour of the times. He also published *Good Thoughts in Bad Times* (1645), and, five years later, *Good Thoughts in Worse Times*, in which wit and practical wisdom are admirably fused with grave piety. But his literary fame probably will always depend on the *Worthies of England*, the result of years of patient and painstaking preparation. County by county he gathered up an encyclopædic record of the natural resources and great worthies of the country. It is said that he would sit patiently for hours listening to the gossip of whomsoever he met, in order to gather items of local interest or of

traditional story, which he could work up into this mighty book. His gentle humour, natural kindliness, quaint and quiet homeliness, and great cheerfulness combined with and subdued by his pious feeling, render his pages singularly attractive.

3 Burton — In some respects **Robert Burton** (1577-1639) closely compares with Fuller. Like him, he was a divine, quaintly and curiously learned, and a man of humour. His one book, *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, first published in 1621 and reissued with successive additions several times in his lifetime, is undoubtedly one of the masterpieces of his century. Educated at Oxford, and vicar of Saint Thomas in that city for some time, he was appointed about 1630 to the Rectory of Seagrave, in Leicestershire, but appears to have remained resident in his university town. He took no part in public affairs, but continued all his life a quiet student, reading in his countless books, and working up with laborious pains the inexhaustible treasures of learning which fill the pages of his book, and which, but for him, would long since have been forgotten. Its strange title and its strange appearance as one first glances at its pages give no promise of its inexhaustible interest. It may safely be said that no book containing such a wealth of curious learning, and such elaboration of detail in the discussion of its subject, can compare with this in the charm it exercises over the mind of him who will pause but for a little while to read. The book may be opened at any page with the same "security to please." Following the scholastic treatment of the physiological science of his day, Burton treats melancholy as a literal humour "engendered in the body," producing diversity of effects according to the diversities of its attack upon the system. "If it be within the body, and not putrefied, it causeth black jaundice, if putrefied, a quartan ague, if it break out to the skin, leprosy, if to parts, several

maladies, as scurvy, etc. If it trouble the mind, as it is diversely mixed, it produceth several kinds of madness and dotage, of which in their place”

With division upon division, and subdivision upon subdivision, Burton proceeds to analyse the causes, effects, varieties, and cures of this malady. His style, with its endless quotations and references, its infinitely long digressions, strangely forbidding at first sight, proves to be curiously accordant with the quaintness of the subject. You feel that the whimsical old man himself looks out of his book at you, and addresses you in the whimsical manner of his whimsical fancies. He is genial, humorous, delightfully simple. Like Democritus of old, “a man of an excellent wit, profound conceit,” he, Democritus Junior, passes in and out, a mere spectator of other men’s fortunes and adventures. Like him, he says, “I laugh at all.” His words and phrases are strung together with the cunning art of a master who deliberately chooses them as the natural vehicle for the thoughts he has to utter. He is never tedious, you may break off from him when you please, and you may resume with him when and where you will. His quotations, with his own quaint translations of them immediately following, are always fitting, and aptly illustrate the wisdom he measures out to his reader with philosophical seriousness.

4 Sir Thomas Browne—During the years in which Burton sat poring over his books at Oxford, and improving the successive editions of his work, another profound scholar was busying himself in his hours of leisure, writing a book equally remarkable for its powerful expression of the personality of its author, the strangeness of its conceits, the unusualness and beauty of its style, which together make it one of the most notable prose productions of the century. The writer is Sir Thomas Browne, the book, his famous *Religio Medici*.

Like Fuller and Burton, Browne was essentially a humorist, and the three form a notable trio. The humour of each had its own distinctive flavour and quality, each in its way of the highest order. Thomas Fuller's bright and cheery face, eyes dancing with merriment, lips bubbling forth with rippling laughter, and the wit of a spirit full of gaiety, belong to a man whose humour made him always merry, always gay, always bright and even witty, though never vulgar in his treatment of any subject, least of all the most serious and sacred things. On the other hand, Burton's humour, though abundant and perfectly genuine, was tinged with a certain disposition to gloominess, it was the humour of a man given to solitariness, and inevitably therefore disposed (though with Burton it became nothing more than a disposition) to be cynical and satiric. But Sir Thomas Browne's was the humour of a man, like Fuller, always cheerful, but quiet and grave, his cheerfulness never expanded into merriment, it had its foundations in a spirit habitually calm, absorbed in meditation, subdued with a peace which enriched and dignified his character and his work.

Sir Thomas Browne was born in London in 1605. He took his doctor's degree at Leyden, and finally settled, in 1637, as a practitioner in Norwich, where he spent the rest of his life. He was a consistent Royalist, but more completely than any of the great writers of the period of revolution he took no active partisanship. He lived quietly through all those troublous years, occupied with his extensive and lucrative practice, and amusing and edifying himself in his leisure hours with his excursions into the unfrequented byways of curious learning.

The *Religio Medici* was not originally intended for publication. The book was written as a kind of personal record of the inquiries of its writer's restless spirit, it is a kind of diary of the soul.

The manuscript was shown first to one friend and then to another, apparently more than one friend was given permission to copy what proved to be so admirable a composition. This went on for several years, when, to Browne's dismay and without his authority, an imperfect version appeared in print in 1642. Browne felt compelled in his own interests to issue a perfect copy, the first of which appeared in 1643. In his address to the reader, prefixed to this, he tells us that the essay was composed "about seven years past." The book leaped immediately into fame. Its speculative mood, indulging itself especially upon religion, was exactly fitted to the introspective religious thought of the Puritan age. This was the book's first pledge of success. But there was more, its language and style were distinguished, the undertone of imaginative fervour gave it a living voice, its lofty and sustained flights of eloquence, its rhetorical fulness, its conscious Latinity, its finely balanced phrasings, even the obscurities of its pedantry, combined to lift the book itself to an exalted position within a few years of its publication. Its fame quickly overspread the continent of Europe.

Meanwhile, for the next ten years, Browne amused himself in collecting and arranging material for that very strange book, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica*, a ponderous work which appeared in 1646, and which consists of "Inquiries into very many received tenets and commonly presumed truths, which, examined, prove but vulgar and common errors." It is a monument of his curious care and quenchless thirst for inquiry into the remote and obscure places of learning. It is also an interesting and instructive statement of the scientific position of his day. Thirty years had elapsed since Bacon gave to the world his *Novum Organum*, in which he established the great principles of inductive science. Observation reinforced by experiment must furnish the data upon which the

man of science may build his conclusions, which again in their turn must be verified by observation and experiment. There must be no generalising in theory, save that which follows minute examination of the facts, and experimental proof must demonstrate the reliability of the conclusion. Browne does not nearly attain to the scientific position of those who in the second half of the seventeenth century founded the Royal Society, but he is in the direct line of succession from the great founder of modern science. His book is an amusing exposure of the ignorance, stupidity, and superstition of the age. Men were still content with their old authorities and with the traditional scientific theories dating from the schools of Aristotle, Galen, and Hippocrates. Yet even Browne himself was not far enough advanced to venture to give his adherence to the Copernican system, and he still retained a firm belief in witchcraft and sorcery. The subject of this book did not in any case lend itself freely to literary treatment, but shortly afterwards Browne published his *Hydriotaphia, or Urn Burial* (1658), to which he appended a small treatise, entitled the *Garden of Cyrus*.

These have all the striking literary characteristics of their author. Always interested in the "finds" of the antiquarian, he received numbers of rare coins, urns, gems, bones, and ancient ornaments from time to time from his numerous friends. In 1657 a great number of funeral urns were turned up at old Walsingham, and these set Browne's mind at work upon the burial customs of all ages, with the result that we have his treatise on *Urn Burial*, full of learning, worked up by his gorgeous imagination into a book of quite extraordinary power. His thought seems inflamed with sacred fire, his language is that of the seer. In his sonorous periods we seem to hear echoes of voices which spoke to him out of "the ruins of forgotten times." Curious and

quaint descriptions of burial customs fill the greater part of the book, which leads up to a conclusion upon the vanity of ambition for fame after death "There is nothing strictly immortal but immortality To subsist in lasting monuments, to live in their productions, to exist in their names, and predicament of chimeras, was large satisfaction upon old expectations, and made one part of their elysiums But all this is nothing in the metaphysics of true belief To live indeed is to be again ourselves, which being not only a hope, but an evidence, in noble believers, 'tis all one to lie in St Innocent's churchyard, as in the sands of Egypt, ready to be anything, in the ecstasy of being ever, and as content with six foot as the moles of Adrianus" Thus ends the treatise with a diction as noble as the thought is elevated—thought and words harmonising in the perfect music of his noblest example of prose The *Garden of Cyrus* is Browne's most difficult composition Its sub-title is "Quincuncial, Lozenge or Network Plantations of the Ancients, artificially, naturally, mystically considered" It is a description of the quincunx, or figure of five, which he discovers in the plan of the gardens of the ancients, and which is everywhere reproduced in nature and in art In it Browne gives full range to his mystical thought, linked with a display of vast learning and curious and close observation, which trace a likeness or correspondence between things seemingly as far asunder as the opposite poles of heaven The discursive essay closes in a strain of exquisite beauty, as the author lays down his pen at the conclusion of his task and sinks into the lap of reposeful sleep, it is as though he breathes a final note of song scarce above a whisper, yet the soft refrain is heard in the clear air of calm night under the broad expanse of heaven

5 **Jeremy Taylor.**—Yet one more great figure

detains us in our survey of the prose-writers of the first half of the seventeenth century—**Jeremy Taylor** (1613-67), the greatest preacher of an age remarkable for its pulpit eloquence. Born in Cambridge, of humble parents, he received his early education under the famous Perse, and, still benefiting by the munificence of that pious man, was entered sizar at Caius College in his fourteenth year. The impression he made by his advancement in learning was such that his companions regarded him as "no less than the son of Apollo, the God of wisdom and eloquence." In 1634 he was suddenly called upon to fill the place of a college friend who had been appointed a preacher at St Paul's in London, and immediately became famous for the eloquence of his sermons, which "made his hearers take him for some young angel, newly descended from the visions of glory."

His fame reached the ears of Archbishop Laud, who took him under his patronage and training, and secured his election in 1636 to a perpetual fellowship at All Souls, Oxford. Here he made the acquaintance of William Chillingworth, who shortly afterwards published the most learned and famous theological treatise of the century, *The Religion of the Protestants, a Safe Way to Salvation* (1637). Two years later, Bishop Juxon presented him to the living of Uppingham, where he remained for five years, being also Chaplain-in-ordinary to the King. These were happy years of painstaking, pastoral labours performed with conscientious and loving care. The gathering strength of the Puritan movement, and its open and determined opposition to the Episcopalian system of church government, culminated in a resolution of Parliament in September 1642, to abolish all bishops. This called forth Taylor's first work in advocacy of the Church, *Episcopacy Asserted* (1642). Taylor now found himself in the full tide of the great religious struggle of the time, and henceforward his

fortunes and misfortunes are linked with those of the king. His conviction and open profession alike bound him to the king's cause. His living was sequestrated, and he appears for some time to have accompanied Charles's army. The failure of the king's cause drove him in retirement into Wales. At Golden Grove, the seat of Lord Carbery, he now spent the three or four happiest and most peaceful years of his life. Toward the end of the Commonwealth he allowed himself to be persuaded to accept a lectureship at Lisburn, in the north of Ireland, and at the Restoration he received the appointment to the Bishopric of Down. He occupied the see for the last six years of his life—years filled with controversial and domestic troubles.

Taylor's writings are voluminous, and in most of them he was engaged in that religious controversy which chiefly occupied the thoughtful men of his time. He was, of course, a champion of the Episcopal system. This section of his writings need not particularly concern us. The most interesting, and one of the most important, was his *Liberty of Prophesying*, and its interest lies in its charity and catholicity of thought. In it Taylor pleads for toleration, for freedom of thought and speech. It is curious to note that he makes this plea on behalf of the Church, and addresses it to the Puritans, to whom that same Church had denied such freedom. But we cannot think that Taylor's plea was put in under the pressure of the circumstance of the hour, it belonged to the genius of his heart and the generosity of his soul. In his argumentative works we must not look for close reasoning and clever handling of the logician's tools. This could hardly be expected from one who was first and foremost a great preacher, and whose use of the pen was ancillary to the oratory of the pulpit. Consequently, Taylor's prose is florid and ornate, its periods are long, consisting of phrase piled upon

phrase, and sentence added to sentence, with the connective "and" Like Browne and Milton, he is fond of Latinisms, though perhaps his use of these is more sparing than theirs But, unlike theirs, his style is always natural and flowing He has great wealth of illustrations, drawn both from nature and from books—the former of rich suggestiveness, the latter of great classical learning In the books by which he most deserves to be known as a prose-writer—his *Holy Living* (1650), *Holy Dying* (1651), and *Twenty-eight Sermons* (1651), all produced during the Garden Grove period—he is always easy to follow, because of the ease and grace of his movement His style rises and falls with the natural movement of the subject, suddenly he lifts his reader high into the heavens, and his diction expands with his expanding emotions, a divine afflatus stirs his being, suddenly, yet quite naturally, he is leading his reader in quiet and peaceful paths by the gentle river or in the shaded woods, where all is stillness and calm In all alike we hear a good, kind, holy man speaking to us—a man with a lofty conception of life, a noble ideal of living, a heart sincere, and speech always true to these In his *Holy Living* he gives us what is practically a treatise of Christian Ethics, and discusses the rules to which he must adhere who would live holily and well The book has many noble passages and much ripe wisdom, expressed aphoristically, but as a whole it does not rise to the level of his *Holy Dying* In this book Taylor treats of the shortness and uncertainty of life, and finds in the consideration of these, not a reason or excuse for morbid fears and dull apathy of living, but a purpose for life, since a life well spent must, when the end comes, have a happy ending We take a specimen passage, a sentence in fact, which well illustrates his rhetorical fulness, and, especially in the last clause, the exquisite delicacy of his fancy —

When a good man dies, one that hath lived innocently, or made joy in heaven at his timely and effective repentance, and in whose behalf the holy Jesus hath interceded prosperously, and for whose interest the Spirit makes interpellations with groans and sighs unutterable, and in whose defence the angels drive away the devils on his death-bed, because his sins are pardoned, and because he resisted the devil in his life-time, fought successfully, and persevered unto the end, then the joys break forth through the clouds of sickness, and the conscience stands upright, and confesses the glories of God, and owns so much integrity, that it can hope for pardon, and obtain it too, then the sorrows of the sickness, and the flames of the fever, or the faintness of the consumption, do but untie the soul from its chain, and let it go forth, first into liberty, and then to glory, for it is but for a little while that the face of the sky was black, like the preparations of the night, but quickly the cloud was torn and rent, the violence of thunder parted it into little portions, that the sun might look forth with a watery eye, and then shine without a tear

In his volume of *Twenty-eight Sermons*, we have some of the noblest poetry of prose, passages in which noble thought and noble imagery are wedded in a perfect union, and which give full justification for Coleridge's claim that Taylor was "the most eloquent of divines," the English Chrysostom. In our study of them we cannot withhold our admiration for them as examples of splendid eloquence. Observe, in the following, his art in the elaboration of his illustration taken from the skylark, "I have seen a lark rising from his bed of grass, and soaring upwards, singing as he rises, and hopes to get to heaven, and climb above the clouds, but the poor bird was beaten back with the loud sighings of an eastern wind, and his motion made irregular and inconstant, descending more at every breath of the tempest, than it could recover by the libration and frequent weighing of his wings, till the little creature was forced to sit down and pant, and stay till the storm was over, and then it made a prosperous flight, and did rise and sing, as if it had learned music and motion from an angel, as he passed sometimes through

the air about his ministries here below; so is the prayer of a good man" Thus it is usually in Taylor image and subject are fused as in the greatest poetry

6 **Selden and Others** —Burton, Browne, and Taylor are very great men, and the two latter are among our very greatest masters of English prose. But the prose-writers resemble the contemporary poets in being men who developed their rich gifts in solitude or isolation. Each pursues his way alone, undirected by any "stream of tendency" peculiar to his time. Something will be said of Milton's prose later on, that, indeed, shows many of the rougher edges of Puritanism, but is as much his own as his poetry is. We might have examined the crispness and directness of the learned John Selden's style in his *Table Talk*, the learning and acute wit of Hales, whose just thought and eloquent manner make him a forerunner to Jeremy Taylor, whilst for interest other than literary, Owen Felltham's *Resolves*, Ussher's *Annals*, as well as the *Eikon Basilike*, attributed to King Charles, might be mentioned. While full of interest, it is equally varied and heterogeneous. Notice will be taken in a later chapter of the work of the immortal dreamer, along with that of other prose-writers who carry us through the second half of the century, and to whom the writers we have been discussing exhibited the manner and the means of a worthy prose style, deliberately and successfully directed to the expression and adornment of the breadth and variety of the thought to which it gave suitable form.

CHAPTER IV

Milton

Milton the Supreme Poetic Genius of his Century A Man of his Age, yet a Solitary Figure His Moral Purpose *On the Morning of the Nativity* Six Years of Retirement at Horton The Poetry of these Years *L'Allegro, Il Penseroso, Comus, Lycidas* Growth of Interest in Social and Political Events Italian Journey The Prose Works The Latin Secretaryship The Sonnets *Paradise Lost* its Sources of Inspiration, its Argument, its Chief Characters, Satan, Adam, Eve *Paradise Regained* *Samson Agonistes* Shakespeare and Milton

1608	Milton born in London	1649	<i>Enkonoelastes</i>
1629	<i>The Nativity Hymn</i>	1660	<i>The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Commonwealth</i>
	<i>L'Allegro and Il Penseroso</i>		
1634	<i>Comus</i>	1666	<i>Paradise Lost</i> published.
1638	<i>Lycidas</i>	1671	<i>Paradise Regained</i>
1638-9	Italian Journey		<i>Samson Agonistes</i>
1644	<i>Tractate on Education</i>	1674	Milton died.
1644	<i>Areopagitica</i>		

1 **Milton's Place in English Literature.**—John Milton is by far the greatest figure in the literature of the seventeenth century, indeed, as a poet, he excels all other English poets save Shakespeare alone. As an epic poet, he takes his place with Homer, Virgil, and Dante. Born when Shakespeare's creative energy was in its full tide and the Elizabethan drama was at its highest pitch of excellence, already, before he died, the dramas of the post-Restoration period were appearing in rapid succession at the demand of a

generation depraved and corrupt, produced by writers witty and clever, but uninspired by worthy ideals, least of all under the impulse of such lofty and generous emotions as stirred the blood of the great Elizabethans Milton thus fills a period of transition. He himself belonged to no literary school, he founded no school. He gathered from the past what wealth of learning and of art it offered to his search, and he applied himself diligently to the study of the great world of literature which had been revealed to Western Europe in the Renaissance. He completes the triumvirate of the great English men of literature whose genius was inspired by that great revival of learning—Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton. His birth dates about eight years before the death of Shakespeare, Spenser's *Faerie Queene* was published when Shakespeare was in his prime, thus these three greatest of English poets may be said to have clasped hands. But, notwithstanding, Milton is a strangely solitary figure. He stands supremely alone. It may be paradoxically said that he was essentially a man of his own age, and yet a man of no age, since he was for all the ages yet to be. There burned in him with purest flame the fire which inflamed the hearts of the mass of the commonalty of England in his day. Men longed for, and eagerly sought the means of establishing and exercising their right to free self-government. Their political ideals were inspired by their religious thought. It was a life-and-death struggle for civil and religious liberty, a struggle in which the party who fought for freedom was chiefly moved by the moral earnestness and deep-seated piety of the Puritans. Milton is the poet of Puritanical England, and thus he is essentially a man of his own age. But he strives apart and sternly alone in the midst of the very people to whose emotions and ideals, thoughts and purposes, he is giving such mighty utterance. In the supremacy

of his genius, in the clearness of his conception of his life's purpose, in his directness of aim, in the calm and lofty splendour of his imagination, in the proud aloofness of his spirit and resolute preservation of himself from all taint of corruption by undue contact with meaner and lower spirits than his own, Milton is not the man of his particular time. In his greatest work, the *Paradise Lost*, in one sense the great epic of Puritanism, he produced a poem which gives utterance to thoughts and expresses ideals not peculiar to his own age or to the Puritan movement, but which in the alembic of his mighty mind are transfused, transformed, and elevated into the all-embracing purposes, ideals, and aspirations of the human race, enlightened by the spirit of Christianity, and informed by the revelation of the pure and the invisible.

2 Milton's Early Years—Milton was born in Bread Street, in the heart of London, in 1608. He was educated at St Paul's School, and at the age of sixteen went to Christ's College, Cambridge, where he spent seven years. Even as a child, he was devoted to his books. He himself says "My appetite for knowledge was so voracious, that, from twelve years of age, I hardly ever left my studies, or went to bed before midnight. This primarily led to my loss of sight." His father intended him for the Church, but, ere long, "perceiving what tyranny had invaded in the Church, and that he who took orders must subscribe, slave, and take an oath withal, I thought it better to prefer a blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and began with servitude and forswearing." Here we see the temper of the man. This was the spirit which swayed his whole life, he was resolved always to act nobly, and strictly in accordance with the dictates of his conscience. He strove to live "as ever in the great Taskmaster's eye." This lofty moral purpose

breathes throughout his writings His passionate love of liberty, his hatred of every form of vice, his regard for the inviolability of conscience, his reverence for righteousness and for the sanctities of religion, no less than his lack of humour and of human weaknesses, mark him a thorough Puritan

Early Verse — His earliest attempts at versification do not call for our notice, but in his twenty-first year he produced the first poem worthy of the great fame he was afterwards to win as a poet, his hymn *On the Morning of the Nativity* The early dawn of the Christmas morn of 1629 called forth this song His mind was filled with thought of the Babe of Bethlehem to whom the wise men brought their gifts, and the question rises within him

Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain,
To welcome Him to this His new abode?

See how from afar upon the eastern road
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet •
Oh, run, prevent them with thy humble ode,
And lay it lowly at His blessed feet,
Have thou the honour first thy Lord to greet,
And join thy voice unto the angel quire,
From out His secret altar touched with hallowed fire

Thus closes the introduction to the poem in the modified stanza of Spenser The hymn follows, a mighty peal of song, in an irregular but vigorous verse Earth is at peace when the Prince of Peace was born

No war, or battle's sound,
Was heard the world around,
The idle spear and shield were high uphung;
The hooked chariot stood
Unstained with hostile blood,
The trumpet spake not to the armed throng;
And kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

In the hush of the peaceful night the shepherds heard the angels' song heralding the golden age to come. Peace begins and peace ends the story, but in fine contrast and display of the poet's love of classic beauty, he describes the "dismal horror" of pagan worship, and foretells the flight of pagan superstition on the Saviour's advent.

Studious Retirement — On leaving Cambridge, Milton went to live with his father, who had retired from business and had settled at Horton, in Buckinghamshire. Here he passed his next six years, steeping his mind in the wisdom of the Greek and Latin writers, and always learning "something new in mathematics and music, in which sciences he delighted". Without avowed profession, yet persuaded that his life was destined to some high and noble purpose, his life was regulated by "an inward prompting which grows daily upon me, that by labour and intent study, which I take to be my portion in this life, I [may] perhaps leave something so written to after times as they should not willingly let die."

In this haunt of quiet beauty, not far from the silvery Thames, the halls of Eton, and the stately towers of Windsor, Milton produced four poems which claim our close attention. They are, *L'Allegro*, *Il Penseroso*, *Arcades*, and *Comus*. This period of his poetic activity was closed by the production of *Lycidas* in 1637. Thereafter, excepting for the sonnets, his muse was silent for well-nigh twenty years. These smaller poems reflect the grave joyousness of Milton's years of retirement and silent companionship with Nature. He saw and heard her in a thousand changeful sights and sounds. Under the canopy of heaven he observed how

Morn,
Waked by the circling hours, with rosy hand
Unbarred the gates of light

He found it his joy in his waking hours

To hear the lark begin his flight,
And, singing, startle the dull night,
From his watch-tower in the skies,
Till the dappled dawn doth rise

As he took his walks abroad

The ploughman, near at hand,
Whistles o'er the furrowed land,
And the milkmaid singeth blithe,
And the mower whets his scythe

The lines which fall from the lips of "Comus" he might well have applied to himself during these happy years

I know each lane, and every alley green,
Dingle, or bushy dell, of this wild wood,
And every bosky bourn from side to side,
My daily walks

He knew the sunshine holiday of the swain with his draughts of "spicy nut-brown ale", he knew the milkmaid with her "cream-bowl duly set", he knew the simple pleasures of those who dwelt in the "upland hamlets,"

When the merry bells ring round,
And jocund rebecks sound,
To many a youth, and many a maid,
Dancing in the chequered shade

The abundant stores of Nature's secrets now revealed to him, augmented later by his travels in Italy, proved inexhaustible when, in later years, and in blindness, he drew upon them for his descriptions of the exquisite beauty of that Paradise in which he places our first parents, Adam and Eve. How else could he have told us of the flowers which

Nature boon
Poured forth profuse on hill, and dale, and plain,
Both where the morning sun first waimly smote
The open field, and where the unpierced shade
Imbrowned the noontide bowers

How else could he have painted in such faultless detail this picture of evening shading off into night?

Now came still evening on, and twilight grey
Had in her sober livery all things clad,
Silence accompanied, for beast and bird,
They to their grassy couch, these to their nests
Were slunk, all but the wakeful nightingale
She all night long her amorous descant sung,
Silence was pleased. Now glowed the firmament
With living sapphires, Hesperus, that led
The starry host, rode brightest, till the moon,
Rising in cloudy majesty, at length
Apparent queen, unveiled her peerless light,
And o'er the dark her silver mantle threw

L'Allegro and Il Penneroso—*L'Allegro* and *Il Penneroso* are twin poems, odes presenting contrasted views of the scholar's life alternately, as the flame of his imagination is cast in cheerful or in pensive mood. *L'Allegro* begins with early morning, and ends at night, *Il Penneroso* begins with late evening, and ends with "civil-suited morning." The thought and imagery in the first-named poem are exactly paralleled, thought by thought, and scene by scene, in the companion poem. The verse, constructed with faultless art, exactly fits the mood of each poem. In *L'Allegro* it runs on smoothly and sweetly, now and again breaking out into the haste and hurry of exuberant joyousness. In *Il Penneroso* there are frequently pauses in the line suggestive of the slow movement and frequent halts of the pensive man who stops again and again to think. The imagery and allusions are chosen similarly to create the necessary effects. In *L'Allegro* we have "Zephyr, with Aurora playing," the whistling ploughman, the singing milkmaid, the sunshine holiday, in *Il Penneroso* he invokes the "pensive" nun

Sober, steadfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkest grain,
Flowing with majestic train,
And sable stole of cypress lawn.

The silence of the evening is broken by Philomel, who "will deign a song in her sweetest, saddest plight most musical, most melancholy" He lights his lamp "at midnight hour," and sits

In some high lonely tower,
Where I may oft out-watch the Bear

Both poems undoubtedly reflect the moods of the poet himself, but we cannot doubt that his wider sympathies are with the pleasures which melancholy gives, and that Milton speaks unmistakably of himself and the pleasures dearest to his own heart, when he tells of the feet that

Never fail
| To walk the studious cloisters pale,
And love the high embowed roof,
With antique pillars massy proof,
| And storied windows richly dight,
Casting a dim religious light

These, and the pealing organ with the full-voiced choir,

Dissolve me into ecstasies,^f
| And bring all heaven before mine eyes

These poems breathe the spirit of the cultured Puritan which, it is to be observed, finds pure delight in the contemplation of all that is beautiful in nature and in art Milton clearly loved nature as well as books in these early years, before his life was drowned in religious and political strife (He described Nature with a scholar's language, but looked at her with a poet's eye)

Arcades.—*Arcades* is an unfinished masque, presented "to the Countess Dowager of Derby at Harefield, near to Hoxton" After an introductory

song by the masquers, who approach through an avenue of elms, the Genius of the Wood appears and speaks in eighty lines of rhymed verse. Two other songs follow, both pretty, but not equal to Milton's great power. The production bears the stamp of the occasional upon it.

4 *Comus*—In *Comus*, Milton has given us a masque in every respect worthy of his great powers. It was presented at Ludlow Castle in 1634. It was written at the suggestion of Henry Lawes, who composed the music, and was intended to be performed at an entertainment given by the Earl of Bridgewater, to celebrate his entry upon the office of Lord President of Wales. The first scene discovers a wild wood. The lady, a beautiful maiden, wandering by night with her two brothers, is lost in the woods. Comus, son of Circe, is an enchanter, having power to turn his victims into beasts. The brothers leave their sister and set out to find, if they can, a way out of the woods. Comus comes upon the maiden thus left alone, disguised as a gentle shepherd, and lures her into his fairy palace, whose chambers are filled with the soft sounds of voluptuous music, and in whose dining-hall tables are spread with dainties and the "sweet poison of misused wine." But all his spells are powerless against her chastity. The brothers, led by the lady's guardian spirit, come upon his palace and rescue their sister from Comus. The enchanter escapes, and the lady is left still under his enchantments until Sabrina, Goddess and Nymph of Chastity, is invoked and delivers her. The scene now changes to Ludlow Castle, where country dancers hold their festal games. These disappear when the attending spirit enters with the two brothers and the lady, and presents them to the earl. They dance a courtly measure, after which the spirit speaks the epilogue, in the conclu-

sion of which the moral of the whole piece is thus disclosed

Mortals, that would follow me,
Love virtue, she alone is free
She can teach ye how to climb
Higher than the sphery chime,
Or, if virtue feeble were,
Heaven itself would stoop to her

It was a strange accident that Milton, the Puritan poet, should have been the last composer of a masque for the courtly cavaliers. The Puritan sentiment, which was now becoming predominant with the nation, was unfavourable to such forms of amusement, and disapproved of dramatic presentations. Under this chilling influence the masque was dying out. But in 1633 Prynne published his *Histriomastix*, in which he violently attacked the stage, and, by reason of his allusions to the queen and other high personages in the work, was condemned to stand in the pillory, to lose both his ears, and to pay a heavy fine. This created a temporary diversion in favour of the masque, and a temporary revival resulted. It was in this brief period of revival that *Comus* appeared. The masque depended for its success not merely on its poetry, but at least equally upon its musical accompaniment, the skill and splendour of its "staging," and the fitness of its occasion. But *Comus* soars far beyond its occasion, and rises, independent of its scenic or musical accompaniments, into the glory of a great and noble poem. Its richness in imagination, its style, its thought, its dignity, but above all, its moral purpose, proclaim it a production of the highest excellence. It caught the attention of men of culture, who discovered in its author a poet about whose powers there could no longer be any doubt. Sir Henry Wotton writes of it as "a dainty piece of entertainment, wherein I should much commend the tragical part, if the lyrical did

not ravish me with a certain Doric delicacy whereunto I must plainly confess to have seen yet nothing parallel in our language" The phrase "Doric delicacy" is finely expressed, and with discernment, the lyrics have sweetness too, but it is in the dignity of its blank verse that the poetry, as such, deserves the special mark of excellence But beyond all, there is a stateliness in the progress of the poem and an elevation of moral purpose hitherto altogether unapproached It is steeped in the nectar of the finest poems of Elizabethan literature, but it went far beyond, and marked a new departure in English poetry All the grave gaiety of Milton's youthful heart was there, but there was planted with this, in the easiest and most graceful manner, all the deep-toned seriousness of the Puritan soul which strove for the realisation, in his life and in the life of the nation, of virtue and temperance, and would exclude from its view all the frivolities, baseness, and gross pleasures of the dissolute and abandoned cavaliers The poem sings the glory of virtue and righteousness of purpose in life, and proclaims the security of the virtuous soul in the protection vouchsafed to it by the Divine Spirit that presides over all

5 *Lycidas* —Three years more of companionship with his books and pluming of his wings for the great flight in poetry, which now became more firmly fixed in Milton's purpose, followed upon the publication of *Comus* He then took up his lyre once more, to sing his pastoral song of *Lycidas* Edward King, the subject of the poem, was a friend of Milton's during his student years at Cambridge Full of promise, his career was cut short by his being drowned at sea when crossing from Chester to Dublin A number of his friends resolved to prepare a volume of memorial verses, with the result that a collection of twenty-three Latin, Greek, and English

pieces was issued. The last of these was Milton's *Lycidas*, and the only one worthy either of its subject or of the name of poetry. Milton describes it, under its title, as a monody, in which "the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish seas, 1637, and, by occasion, foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then in their height." It is a pastoral, with an introduction and an epilogue, and between them the threnody of the mourning shepherd, Milton himself, moaning the loss of his shepherd companion, King. The poem is constructed with unusual care, and has a most artistic form. It has no note of passionate grief, but with wonderfully apt imagery the facts of the life and the circumstances of the death of King are successively represented—all pastorally expressed. We have described to us the shepherds' companionship at Cambridge, where they both had wooed the poetic muse, for King

Knew

Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme

Then comes the inexplicable loss. Where were the Nymphs when the remorseless deep engulfed their loved Lycidas? In lofty strain the poem proceeds. Old Triton steps upon the scene, and explains that Neptune was not responsible for his loss. Camus, the local deity of the Cam, follows with his wail of lament. Next comes St Peter, "the Pilot of the Galilean Lake," who bemoans the loss of a faithful herdsman only too sorely needed at this time when so many false shepherds neglect their hungry sheep. But, checking himself, the poet returns to the more purely pastoral strain, and in exquisitely beautiful lines calls upon the vales and valleys low to cast upon the grave where Lycid lies.

The song now lifts its music, bidding the shepherds
that remain

Weep no more,
For Lycidas, your sorrow, is not dead,

for he is

Mounted high,
Through the dear might of Him that walked the waves,
Where other groves, and other streams along,
With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love

The quiet undertone of pensive piety, with the idyllic sweetness of the piece throughout, give to this poem an undefinable charm and a unique place in the pastoral poetry of our language. Nothing quite like it was ever heard before or after. Milton's grief was both personal and public, it was his friend he mourned, but also the young man of great gifts and noble character—one of the few worthy ones of his time. Why should these indispensable ones die? It is the old, old plaint of Job, answered with a Puritan's faith. With the composition of *Lycidas* the Milton of early days passes. Well-nigh twenty years of fierce political struggle must be endured ere he may return again to the work to which, all those years notwithstanding, he was persuaded he was destined. And then it is another Milton whose poetry we study, and poetry in quite another vein—"to-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new"

6 Milton's Development—In closing our study of the first period of Milton's life, it will be interesting to observe how the poet's early detachment from the great political movement of his time, and his concentration upon his studies, always with an intent gaze upon the great work he is one day to do, "which the world will not willingly let die," are at length broken in upon by the news of the strife of the outer

world Until the appearance of *Comus*, there is nothing in his poetry to suggest any concern for the political or social condition of his country But in *Comus* we have unmistakable indications of the uprising of the spirit of Puritanism within himself *Comus* is undoubtedly a reproof of the spirit of the time—the dissolute, irreligious, sensual spirit of the court party In antagonism to this, Milton sets up the ideal of purity and holiness, which is enshrined in his character of the lady These are the forces opposed and struggling for the ascendancy in the social England of the time In *Lycidas*, again, we see that Milton's gaze is turned upon the same state of things The shepherds of the Church are "hirelings," the clergy are corrupt, "the hungry sheep look up, and are not fed"

But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more

This note in Milton will presently rise and his voice will be heard in the shrillest trumpet tones as he hurls his yet fiercer denunciations against the Presbyters and those who support and approve a system of church government based, as he thinks, on false principles, and calculated to work spiritual and political ruin upon the people of his beloved land

Foreign Travel—Milton left London in 1638, for an extended continental journey Passing through Paris, he went on to Florence, and thence to Rome, Naples, Venice, and other Italian cities His reputation had preceded him, and he was received with glad welcome and respect by the *litterati* of Italy He visited Galileo in prison in Florence He says "I took no steps to conceal my person or my character, if any questions were put to me concerning my faith, I defended it without any reserve or fear For about the space of two months I openly defended

the Reformed religion in the very metropolis of Popery" Preparing to pass over into Sicily and Greece, melancholy intelligence of civil commotions at home caused him to alter his purpose and to set his face homewards for "I thought it disgraceful, while my fellow-countrymen were fighting for liberty, that I should be travelling abroad for pleasure" He reached England in the midsummer, 1639, and settled quietly in London, taking private pupils for a time To this period belongs the composition of his Latin elegy, the *Epitaphium Damonis*, in which he laments the death of his dearest friend, Charles Diodato It is a pastoral poem full of impassioned grief, the work of consummate genius At this time, too, he began to draw up definite plans for the fulfilment of the great desire of his life, and made his first sketch of *Paradise Lost* It was something accomplished for him to have decided what the subject of his great work should be, and that it should be performed "to the adornment of my native tongue" It was only after considering a wide range of possible subjects, Scriptural and British, that he was finally led to decide for *Paradise Lost*, which should be treated in epic and not dramatic form It is said that he even composed a few lines of the poem at this time But, for the present, there was other work for him to do The great rebellion had already broken out, and a literary champion of the cause of liberty in the State and of reformation in the Church was needed By an act of splendid self-sacrifice, he tore himself from the quiet of his study and the delight of "calm and pleasing solitariness, fed with cheerful and confident thoughts," and prepared to employ his pen with his great intellectual gifts in the service of the State Thinking, he says, that "I saw that a way was opening for the establishment of real liberty, that the foundation was laying for the deliverance of man from the yoke of slavery and

superstition, that the principles of religion, which were the first objects of our care, would exert a salutary influence on the manners and constitution of the Republic, and as I had from my youth studied the distinctions between religious and civil rights, I perceived that if I ever wished to be of use, I ought at least not to be wanting to my country, to the Church, and to so many of my fellow-Christians, in a crisis of so much danger, I therefore determined to relinquish the other pursuits in which I was engaged, and to transfer the whole force of my talents and my industry to this one important object." Thus Milton announces the transference of his attentions for the time being from his poetic ambitions to works of controversy in prose

7 The Prose Works—A complete story of Milton's labours during the next twenty years of his life does not properly belong to the story of English Literature, and, with one or two notable exceptions, it is not necessary to examine his prose works with any detail. The fierce struggle in which the nation was involved was enacted not alone on the field of battle, nor even in the stormy debates of Parliament, but also in vigorous pamphleteering campaigns. Many who could not or would not fight with the sword engaged in fierce combat with the pen. Nearly all that they have written was immediately forgotten, and much of Milton's work in this respect, being neither better nor worse than the bulk, can be left by us unmentioned with the rest. Everything that he wrote was issued in the cause of liberty, but much of it was purely controversial, and in his controversies Milton was capable of recrimination and abuse as violent as that of any of those to whom he was opposed. More worthily to be remembered is his *Tractate on Education*, addressed to Samuel Hartlib in 1644. Hartlib was the son of a Polish merchant, residing chiefly in London, and

taking a great interest in every undertaking which seemed likely to advance the well-being of mankind, and especially in education. Attracted by the public spirit of this magnanimous man, and himself practically interested in education, Milton set forth in this short treatise his plans for the provision of "a complete and generous education which fits a man to perform justly, skilfully, and magnanimously all the offices, both public and private, of peace and war." This is a generous conception of the scope of education, and the treatment of the theme is eloquent and clear. But the scheme, by its comprehensiveness and the length of its duration, would obviously be applicable only to the aristocratic section of the community. Evidently Milton has the ideal of Greek education in his mind, such as is given to us, for example, in Plato's *Republic*. Better known to fame is Milton's prose treatise entitled *Areopagitica*, written "for the liberty of unlicensed printing," and published (November 1644) a few months after the *Tractate on Education*. Printing was subjected to a strict censorship by a committee appointed by the State, and Milton himself suffered some of the inconvenience, and, as he thought, restriction of personal liberty, imposed by this condition of things. In defiance of the ordinance of the State, he issued this very work unlicensed and unregistered, for which his prosecution was unsuccessfully attempted. The work takes the form of an oration addressed to the Lords and Commons of England, and is based upon the model of the "Areopagiticus of Isocrates," who from his private house wrote that discourse to the Parliament of Athens, and persuaded them to change the form of democracy which was then established. Milton thus explains the subject of his book — "On the subject of the liberation of the press, so that the judgment of the true and the false, what should be published and what suppressed, should not be in

the hands of a few men, and these mostly unlearned and of common capacity, erected into a censorship over books—an agency through which no one almost can or will send into the light anything that is above the vulgar taste—on this subject, in the form of an express oration, I wrote my *Areopagitica*” This work constitutes Milton’s great claim for notice as a writer of English prose. The conception is a noble one, nobly wrought out. In places it rises to the height of pure and passionate eloquence, the imagery and illustrative material are rich and apposite. It breathes a spirit of confident hope in the great deliverance which those now opposed to tyranny and oppressive rule would presently effect for the people of England. In later years Milton was to be sadly disappointed in the works of those in whom he now so confidently puts his trust. In 1649, by the request of the Parliament, Milton wrote *Eikonoclastes* as a counter-blast to the *Eikon Basilike*, a book which purported to be written by Charles the First in his last days, but is now generally believed to have been the work of Gauden, afterwards Bishop of Exeter. One other of his prose writings may be mentioned, his *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*, directed against the learned Salmasius, who wrote *In Defence of the Royal Cause*. Salmasius was reputed to be the most learned man of Europe, and Milton was requested by Parliament to reply, as the man most able, by reason of his scholarship, to undertake the task. In the performance of this work he deliberately sacrificed his eyesight, and he made the sacrifice willingly for the commonweal. In defending himself at a later time against his calumniators, he says “When I was publicly solicited to write a reply to the *Defence of the Royal Cause*, when I had to contend with the pressure of sickness, and with the apprehension of soon losing the sight of my remaining eye, and when my medical attendants clearly announced that if I

did engage in the work, it would be irreparably lost, their premonitions caused no hesitation and inspired no dismay. I would not have listened to the voice even of Æsculapius himself from the throne of Epidaurus, in preference to the suggestions of the heavenly monitor within my breast, my resolution was unshaken, though the alternative was either the loss of my sight, or the desertion of my duty. I resolved, therefore, to make the short interval of sight which was left me to enjoy as beneficial as possible to the public interest."

8 **The Sonnets**—During the period of his prose-writing Milton composed most of his sonnets, and these constituted his only contribution to poetry in those years. Here again, as always, his verse commands our interest. The student of Elizabethan literature will be well acquainted with the sonnets of writers of that period, who gave much attention to that form of verse. The sonnet is a fourteen-lined verse constructed after Italian models, and especially those of Petrarch, who set the standard. His sonnet consists of two parts—the first eight lines or octave, and the last six or sestet. The rimes in the octave are arranged in two sets of four, thus, *a b b a, a b b a*, in the sestet there are usually three rimes, arranged thus, *c d e, c d e*, but occasionally two rimes, arranged thus, *c d, c d, c d*. Gradually our poets indulged in considerable freedom with the rimes, and Shakespeare himself did not adhere strictly to the standard, though, from the force of his mighty example and the perfection of his art, his sonnets will always stand as a recognised form in English poetry. The departure from the standard consisted chiefly in the introduction of a couplet in the last two lines, which is usually very effective. Milton's exact knowledge of Italian poetry and appreciation of the music of the Petrarchan stanza induced him to reaffirm the Italian rule, and his sonnets are constructed accord-

ingly Wordsworth, in a famous sonnet, speaks thus of Milton's usage of this poetic form

In his hand
The thing became a trumpet, whence he blew
Soul animating strains—alas too few

Of the sonnets of this period, there are sixteen. Of those which preceded, the first is to the nightingale, the second, which is a very notable production expressive of the loftiest aspiration, is "On his having arrived at the age of twenty-three", the five following are Italian, and were written in Italy. The eighth was written in 1642, "when the assault was intended to the city". Of the remaining, the three addressed to Fairfax, Cromwell, and Sir Henry Vane give lofty tribute to those heroes of the popular cause. The sonnet "On the late Massacre in Piedmont" was probably most in Wordsworth's mind when he spoke of "a trumpet" with "soul animating strains". That "On his Blindness" is worthy to compare with the second sonnet already referred to, whilst the series fitly ends in the grace, beauty, and delicacy of feeling which distinguish the poem, "On his Deceased Wife."

9 **The Fall of the Commonwealth** —The death of Oliver Cromwell was speedily followed by anarchy. It was quickly felt that the protectorate was doomed to failure. Milton, appointed Latin secretary in 1651, continued nominally to hold that office even after the abdication of Richard Cromwell, but the publication of his pamphlet, *The Ready and Easy Way to establish a Commonwealth*, in March 1660, resulted in his formal dismissal. In it he vehemently denounced kings, and made an impassioned appeal for a republic in place of a monarchy. His plea fell on deaf ears. Early in May, Charles the Second was proclaimed king, and on 29th May 1660 he entered London in triumph. There was nothing for Milton but to hide himself; his pamphlets were

publicly burned by the hangman, for a time, it is said, he was even in custody, but friendly intervention—probably that of Sir William Davenant, the poet laureate—secured his release. His life was spared, but all his hopes for the nation were shattered. Blind, poor, lacking domestic affection, he lived in close retirement in London. But his imagination was not exhausted. He did not want the illumination of the inward light, his exalted ideals still animated him. With patient continuance in his labour, and serene composure of mind, he now applied himself to the production of his great poem. In 1665 he showed it, completed, to Thomas Ellwood, the Quaker, by the end of 1666 his final revisions were finished, and in August 1667 it was published. Thus *Paradise Lost* appeared.

10 *Paradise Lost*—It is idle to attempt to answer the question whence Milton derived his inspiration. His careful and long-continued course of reading gave him possession of materials gathered from the whole range of the world's literature known in his day, including the noble Greek and Roman writers, and the men of letters of the Renaissance, many of whose names are to-day forgotten and unknown. Stray thoughts were laid up in his storehouse from the Greek tragedians, the epic stories of Homer and Virgil and of Dante, the romances of Ariosto and of Spenser, hints more or less definite may have been derived (as some have contended) from Vondel's *Lucifer*, Andreini's *Adamo*, Sylvester's *Du Bartas*, or Giles Fletcher's *Christ's Victory and Triumph*. But the supreme source of his inspiration is to be found in the Bible and in the workings of his own mind, cast in noble frame, expanding itself on the great problem how to "justify the ways of God to men." The poem presents figures, images, terms, allusions, and illustrations drawn from the whole range of classical literature, and interwoven with perfect inter-

fusion into a system of theology, and religion which is purely biblical. Thus Milton fuses the two great movements of the Renaissance and Puritanism in his epic story. The form is classical, the spirit and the life are of the Bible as the Puritan expounded that book. The first narratives of the Book of Genesis, with their descriptions in vague outline of the Creation and early man, are taken by Milton as his groundwork, and on this foundation, by the infinite reach of his splendid imagination and the exhaustless resources of his language, with the aid of those other arts of the poet which he practised with the skill of a great master, he has succeeded in constructing a story whose interest and sublimity transcend all others.

The subject of the poem is Man, not a man, but Man and the fortunes of his race in relation to God, to virtue, to morality, to heaven, and to hell. The stage upon which the scenes described must be placed is vast as infinity, and the time of the action stretches backwards into ageless eternity. The universe consists in the poet's imagination, first, of heaven, or the empyrean situated on high, indefinitely extended, and, secondly, of chaos, a vast immeasurable abyss beneath. War in heaven, with angels and archangels ranged in battle, on account of the supremacy conferred by the Almighty upon His Divine Son, results in the defeat of Lucifer or Satan and his rebel hosts, who are flung headlong out of heaven,

With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamantine chains and penal fire

This region is hell, lying in the depths of chaos, a fall of nine days and nights from heaven. Next, out of chaos is marked off the world, which Milton, though he knew the Copernican system, for the

purposes of his poem chooses to describe in accordance with Ptolemaic astronomy. It consists of the whole solar system and the stars. A vast hollow sphere is suspended in chaos by a golden chain from the empyrean. Earth lies at the centre of this sphere, around it revolve the spheres of the moon and the planets, and beyond these the firmament of the fixed stars. As this "world" is attached to heaven at the zenith by its golden chain and staircase, so it was also joined at its nadir to hell by a causeway through chaos, made by sin and death.

The characters in the piece are God, the Divine Son, the archangels Gabriel and Michael, with the countless hosts of angels dwelling in the blaze of heavenly light, the apostate archangel Lucifer, with Beelzebub, Belial, Mammon and their rebel crew, and our first parents Adam and Eve.

The story has its pivot in human affairs, and the critical scene is therefore reached when we arrive with Satan at the boundary of the Garden of Eden. This is not reached by Milton until his fourth book. In all that precedes, with faultless art and unerring footstep, Milton takes his reader over the preliminary scenes, and traces out for him the preliminary circumstances which lead up to the heart and centre of his narrative. The scene opens in hell, where Satan

With his horrid crew,
Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf,
Confounded, though immortal

Lifting his head, he throws "his baleful eyes" around,
and with

Unconquerable will
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield,

holds colloquy with his fallen hosts and debates

with them his warlike counsels The scene is magnificently described, the grandeur of the picture depicted with unexampled splendour of imagery and growing nobility of description The anguish of sorrow and despair gradually give place to unconquerable hate, till with impetuous passion all hell resounds with the shout of defiance hurled by the fallen spirits towards the vault of heaven—

A shout that tore hell's concave, and beyond
Frighted the reign of chaos and old night
All in a moment through the gloom were seen
Ten thousand banners rise into the air,
With orient colours waving, with them rose
A forest huge of spears, and thronging helms
Appeared, and serried shields in thick array
Of depth immeasurable

War thus resolved against the Almighty, the second book opens with further conference, in which it is determined that rather than attempt the recovery of heaven, the ruin of Man shall be attempted, and finally, Satan undertakes the quest of earth—that other

World, the happy seat
Of some new race, called Man, about this time
To be created like to us, though less
In power and excellence, but favoured more
To Him who rules above

Fast by hell-gate he encounters Sin, its portress, and Death, her son She opening the gate lets Satan forth on his perilous journey through chaos to find "the steadfast earth." The third book opens with a scene in heaven, where God, who sees Satan in his flight toward earth, shows to His Son the issue of the conflict between man and his tempter, and His purpose to restore the disobedient children of men by the offices of the Divine Son, who freely offers Himself a ransom The Incarnation is thus foretold.

Satan's flight is further described until, in the opening of the fourth book, he comes in sight of Eden, and the central figure of the story appears. The garden and its inmates are described with witching beauty, together with the innocent discourse of our first parents, as,

Thus talking, hand in hand they passed
On to their blissful bower

The figures crowd upon each other, giving brightest colour to the picture, iris, roses, jessamine, violet, crocus, and hyacinth flowers, garlands, and sweet-smelling herbs, deck the nuptial bed of lovely Eve. Night falls, and the angels appointed by Gabriel mount guard over Adam and Eve in their sleep. They find Satan at Eve's ear, tempting her in a dream, and bring him to Gabriel, to whom he makes scornful speech as he takes his flight. In the fifth book, Raphael is sent from heaven to warn Adam, and thus Milton contrives to work into the poem his story of the first revolt in heaven, which Raphael tells Adam in answer to his question. This story is continued in the sixth book, in which is described the tumult of the angelic revolt, ending with the expulsion of the rebel angels, who take their flight from heaven—

Pursued
With terrors and with furies to the bounds
And crystal wall of heaven, which, opening wide,
Rolled inward, and a spacious gap disclosed
Into the wasteful deep. The monstrous sight
Strook them with horror backward, but far worse
Urged them behind: headlong themselves they threw
Down from the verge of heaven: eternal wrath
Burnt after them to the bottomless pit

In Book VII Raphael's story is continued in the description of the creation of the world. The dis-

course overflows into the eighth book, in which Adam, made bold, asks further questions respecting the celestial motions, receiving ambiguous answer from Raphael, who thus exhorts him

Solicit not thy thoughts with matters hid
 Leave them to God above, Him serve and fear.
 Of other creatures as Him pleases best,
 Wherever placed, let Him dispose, joy thou
 In what He gives to thee, this Paradise
 And thy fair Eve, heaven is for thee too high
 To know what passes there Be lowly wise

This converse with the archangel is grateful to Adam, who further detains him by relating to Raphael what he remembers of his first coming into Paradise, his talk with God, and his first meeting with Eve With final admonition, Raphael returns to heaven, bidding Adam

Stand fast, to stand or fall
 Free in thine own arbitrement it lies
 Perfect within, no outward aid require,
 And all temptation to transgress repel

Thus the story begun in Book IV arches over into Book IX, where the catastrophe of the piece is reached There is something ominous in the very sound of the words which make up the opening lines—

No more of talk where God or angel guest
 With man, as with his friend, familiar used
 To sit indulgent . . .
 I now must change
 Those notes to tragic

Adam is oppressed with an indefinable fear as he reluctantly submits to Eve's proposal that they should go to their several tasks in the Garden, each labouring apart. Thus the enemy of mankind has

Eve at his advantage It is to be observed that the poet gives the arch-fiend no longer those fine attributes of the early portions of the poem, which gave him proportions only less than divine, he is now "the fiend, mere serpent in appearance" And presently the name applied is "the Serpent," in plain terms With flattering speech the Tempter succeeds in exciting wonder and questionings, and so led on, Eve raised "her rash hand in the evil hour forth reaching to the fruit," and plucked and ate Returning to her husband, Eve tells him of her "fatal trespass," which Adam is amazed to hear In excess of love for Eve, he resolves to share her fortunes With vehement love, he exclaims

I feel
The link of Nature diaw me flesh by flesh,
Bone of my bone thou art, and from thy state
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe

Quickly they discover that innocence has left them, overcome with shame, they wander at variance and with mutual accusation into the woods, there to make coverings for themselves And

Covered, but not at rest or ease of mind,
They sat them down to weep

Book X tells how, the success of Satan's attempt being known in heaven, the Divine Son is sent to pronounce judgment upon the unhappy pair Meanwhile, Death and Sin, who sat within the gates of hell, also learning of Satan's success, speed their way to earth Back among the rebel angels, Satan boasts his triumph, but instead of the universal and high applause expected, he hears in reply,

On all sides, from innumerable tongues,
A dismal universal hiss, the sound
Of public scorn He wondered, but not long

Had leisure, wondering at himself now more
 His visage drawn, he felt, to sharp and spare,
 His arms clung to his ribs, his legs entwining
 Each other, till, supplanted, down he fell,
 A monstrous serpent on his belly prone,
 Reluctant, but in vain, a greater power
 Now ruled him, punished in the shape he sinned,
 According to his doom

Thus the poet traces the degradation of the being and character of the great archangel, noble even in his defiance in the opening of the poem, at the end a hideous serpent. Sorrow multiplies upon Adam and Eve, and their hearts are plunged into the bitterness of despair, until Adam, praying God, bids his unhappy consort recall

With what mild
 And gracious temper He both heard and judged,
 Without wrath or reviling

He invites her to repair with him to the place where they were thus judged, and there, prostrate before Him, humbly confess their faults, "and pardon beg." Book XI opens with the presentation of the prayers of the penitents by the Son of God to His Father, who accepts them,*but declares that the disobedient children may no longer remain in Paradise. Michael is sent to announce the Divine decree, at the same time disclosing to Adam the course of future events as far as the Flood. This narration is continued in the twelfth and last book down to the incarnation, death, and resurrection of the Redeemer, and thence to the end of the age, when

The earth
 Shall be all paradise, far happier place
 Than this of Eden, and far happier days

Thus comforted, Adam steps forward with Michael, and awakes Eve, whose mind had, by sleeping

become composed and submissive Together they
pass, Michael leading them by the hand, and

With wandering steps and slow,
Through Eden took their solitary way.

11 Criticism of *Paradise Lost*—Thus in this great poem Milton has achieved what, but for his performance, we might well have pronounced to be the impossible. He dared the attempt to describe things invisible to mortal eye—to relate converse held in the high heaven, to depict the weltering woes of eternal spirits condemned to the abyss of hell. His imagination lifted his gaze to the blaze of light in which God's eternal throne is enveloped, and it lent him ears to catch the whispered counsel of the wily serpent, as he poured his words of deceit into the ears of our mother Eve. He sought, and found, words worthy to describe the tumult of war in heaven, and the flight of myriads of discomfited angels who fell from the battlements of heaven in confusion and despair into the sea of everlasting fire. He himself describes his attempt as an "adventurous song" which "pursues things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme." Success rewarded his daring because his wide learning never failed him, his vocabulary always availed him of words by which to create exactly the impression demanded by the particular description or situation in hand, and often this was done—could only be done—by the employment of such artifices as the free use of names, or the elaboration of a dim figure shadowed forth by the use of a mere word in the sacred or profane writings to which he had constant recourse. With superlative command of his great powers, he never permitted his imagination to get out of hand, but moved supremely self-controlled amid the mighty creations

of his genius. He never lost his way even when it led him wandering through the infinities of space, or when the history he related took him backwards or forwards into infinite time. His instrument of language, too, was wisely and deliberately chosen, and always wielded with resourceful skill. In his diction he blends the Latin and Saxon element of our language in harmonious composition, and thus creates a style, stately and always evenly sustained, which is exactly suited to the loftiness of his subject. He employs in his metre blank verse, which, by his achievement, we recognise without argument as the natural metre for a great and serious subject treated poetically, though we are indebted to Milton for the demonstration. With an ear delicately tuned to catch the rise and fall of the rhythm in his verses, and with an unexampled skill in the management of the breaks in his lines, which he put just where he pleased, and always just where they were most effective, he succeeded in giving to his metre great flexibility and musical quality. His verse is, in fact, highly artificial and elaborate, a result due not only to his "management"* of it, but also to the syntactical art displayed in his construction of his sentences. *Paradise Lost* will always remain a masterpiece of prosody.

Something remains to be said of Milton's chief characters in *Paradise Lost*. These are Satan, Adam, and Eve. Much discussion has been held on the question as to the identity of Milton's hero. Is he Satan or Adam? We think Satan is the real hero of the poem. He undoubtedly is the greatest personage among all the figures crowded upon the stage, and upon the delineation* of his character Milton has expended the greatest amount of his pains. Consider the remarkable transformation in the being and character of the arch-fiend as the

poem progresses In the early books he appears in gigantic proportions of nobility and strength, he is the mighty leader of a mighty host—defeated, but only just defeated, in arms against the Almighty. He recognises his defeat, but preserves all the nobility of an angel in his unconquerable will and stern resolution, though these be expended upon inviolable hate and studied revenge. These emotions gradually take form in actions which spring from subordinate motives, having in them more and more of cunning and miserable deceit. And as the plot develops, Satan descends lower and lower. His lofty pride and high disdain give place to envy, hatred, low craftiness, and base falsehood, these are the means whereby he destroys the primitive innocence of man, which, nevertheless, remains his admiration to the last. His outward form shares in the degradation of his spiritual being. What was in the second book a figure,

Whom now transcendent glory raised
Above his fellows, with monarchial pride
Conscious of highest worth,

becomes in the tenth book “a monstrous serpent on his belly prone.” Yet, as far as *Paradise Lost* is concerned, Satan is triumphant. For the moment he has defeated the designs of the Highest Powers, the inferior order confounds the superior, and, until the Son of God shall come, this confusion must prevail. Satan is the biggest of all epic heroes, only God is mightier than he.

Adam is a noble creation, sharing with Eve the perfect beauty of sinless man and woman, simple and natural in their revelation of pure human nature. He is the embodiment of manly vigour, conscious of the divinity that resides within him, and strong in purpose to make obedience to God

his first duty. She is the embodiment of womanly grace and sweet attractiveness. The supremacy of Adam's nature lies in reason's power, the strength of Eve's in her curiosity for knowledge. Adam's failure to restrain Eve from pursuing the prompting of inquisitive desire leaves her free to wander along the path which leads to her undoing. The strength and tenderness of his love for Eve is the weak link in the chain of Adam's armour, and is the cause of his undoing. The interplay of passion, reason, and will in Milton's portraiture of these two characters shows a subtle power of analysis, and the characterisation to the end of the poem holds us with a strong conviction of the truth of the poet's art to nature.

12 *Paradise Regained*. — Ere *Paradise Lost* met the public eye, Milton was already at work upon its sequel in *Paradise Regained*. He was led to undertake its composition, we are told, by a remark made to him by Thomas Ellwood the Quaker, to whom the poet showed the manuscript of *Paradise Lost*, during the period of his temporary retirement, at the time of the plague in London, to Chalfont St Giles, in Buckinghamshire. "On returning it," says Ellwood, "I pleasingly said to him 'Thou hast said much here of Paradise lost, but what hast thou to say of Paradise found?'" Later, after Milton's return to London, "he showed me," says Ellwood, "his second poem, called *Paradise Regained*, and said in a pleasant tone to me 'This is owing to you, for you put it into my head by the question you put to me at Chalfont, which before I had not thought of'" The poem was published in 1671. It has the same epic form, and much of the dignity and grandeur of *Paradise Lost*. Like its predecessor, it tells "of deeds above heroic", but great as is its subject, it does not rise to the sublimity of *Paradise Lost*. There is more of narrative in it, less of nobility, the vast imagination

was narrowed partly by age, partly by the limitations which the subject put upon it. It has some passages of great eloquence and power, others of sweet and homely beauty, but it bears the traces of its hasty construction and execution. It tells of the recovery of Paradise to all mankind by the victory of Christ over the temptation of the same wily Satan by whose temptation Paradise was previously lost. Following the story of the Temptation as given by Luke, the first book tells of the approach of Satan, disguised as an aged peasant, to Christ as He wanders lost in thought into the desert. In the second book we have the story of the tempter's approach, offering

A table richly spread in regal mode,
With dishes piled and meats of noblest sort
And savour

The second temptation follows in the offer of riches
The tempter says

Riches are mine, fortune is in my hand,
They whom I favour thrive in wealth amain,
While virtue, valour, wisdom, sit in want

The third book opens with the tempter's offer of fame and glory. This failing, the next appeal is that Christ should

Verify
The prophets old, who sung thy endless reign—
The happier reign the sooner it begins
Reign then, what canst thou better do the while

A further attempt is made by the presentation of the kingdoms of the world, in one of the really great passages of the poem in which the wide prospect is described, which Satan spread out before the gaze of

the Son of God, of "the seats of mightiest monarchs" In the fourth book, "perplexed and troubled at his bad success," one more attempt is made of the suggestion to "aim at the highest"—at the kingdom of great and glorious Rome—which is described in a great passage worthy of the mighty city which is its subject Again repulsed, and again recovering, Satan addresses himself to the intellect

The childhood shows the man,
As morning shows the day Be famous then, by wisdom

This phase of the Temptation is narrated with another great descriptive passage, upon which the poet expends all his heart, as upon a subject nearest to his own interests and sympathies Athens, mother of arts and eloquence, is spread out to view Here the poet pays his debt to Greece in a noble eulogy of her statesmen, poets, philosophers, and dramatists And then one more temptation, the last, is introduced Conveyed once more to the wilderness, Satan leaves the Son of God, "feigning to disappear" A violent tempest follows, and out of the storm the tempter reappears, with the suggestion that the storm was aimed chiefly at the Saviour Himself, who, if He be the Son of God, has opportunity now given to prove His word true Whereupon Satan lifts Him high upon the pinnacle of the Temple Speaking thus, in scorn

There stand, if Thou wilt stand, to stand upright
Will ask Thee skill I to Thy Father's house
Have brought Thee, and highest placed highest is best
Now show Thy progeny, if not to stand,
Cast Thyself down

Finally discomfited, the tempter finally leaves Him Angels "received Him soft from His uneasy station,"

and bore Him to a flowery valley, where they refreshed Him with "ambrosial fruits fetched from the Tree of Life"

13 *Samson Agonistes* — Milton's last poem was *Samson Agonistes*, and was published in 1671 with *Paradise Regained*. It is a drama, modelled upon the noblest style of the Greek tragedians. In it he tells the tragedy of a lost cause. Israel fallen into bondage at the hands of the Philistines, is Milton's scriptural parallel for the fall of Puritan England. Samson, the mighty hero of the play, is a figure large enough to fill the whole stage—yet there are great figures besides, especially in Manoa and Dalila. The height from which Samson fell, and the pity of his ruin, measure the depth of England's fall and the sorrow of it. Samson's nobility and strength were his whilst he preserved his purity. This lost, "blind, disheartened, shamed," he sinks to an inglorious end. Yet he is the chosen of God, in him it seems that God's own cause is lost. Is there no hope? Is there no remedy? Great as is the discomfiture of Samson, yet he takes a noble revenge and death. The last scene of all shows him in his most heroic moment. Even though the destruction involved himself, yet in his death his tyrants also find their end. Thus

Living or dying thou hast fulfilled
The work for which thou wast foretold
To Israel, and now liest victorious
Among thy slain

All is best, though we oft doubt
What the unsearchable dispose
Of highest wisdom brings about,
And ever best found in the close

This is the song of hope raised by the grand old

man as he looks out upon the ruinous scene of Puritanism fallen and disgraced. He still lives whose mighty hand was in that mighty movement. Shall its fall awake the note of despair? Is there not yet hope afforded in the thought that God's "uncontrollable intent still remains? Let "peace and consolation" have place, "and calm of mind", the cause is His

There is much of autobiography in Milton's *Samson*. The whole poem, indeed, is rich in its reference to the innermost feeling of the lonely poet in the dark days. The whole poem is pitched in a fine key, the heroic style everywhere fits the heroic subject, some of its passages quiver with the pathos of the story, all is lifted into the region of the sublime, and nothing in literature so closely compares with the composition as the tragedies of Sophocles. In both we find the same noble application of art to permanent moral problems, to the conflict of the human soul with the evil destinies of the universe, and to his tragic triumph over them. Yet in Milton's drama we also seem to have gone back in time some sixty years, and once more to move in the period of the great Elizabethan dramatists. When Milton wrote *Samson Agonistes*, the theatres were again open, and on their stage the corrupt men of the corrupt court of the Restoration were taking pleasure in the presentation of plays in which vice was exalted in place of virtue, corruption magnified, and purity debased. The art expended upon the production of such pieces was as debased as the morals of the pieces themselves. Suddenly, like a ghost from times past, Milton's noble and stately drama moves into our vision—the last, as it is one of the finest in conception and execution, of all English dramas, with all the purity and sincerity of the healthy and happy Elizabethan days.

Shakespeare and Milton — Its great author thus, in his last effort, compels us into an attempted comparison with Shakespeare, to whose lofty eminence he most nearly approaches. And yet the comparison must tend rather to discover points of contrast than points of resemblance. In Shakespeare, we seem to hear the sounds of many instruments, his music is that of an orchestra, there is often gaiety and the music of dancing in his notes, Milton, on the other hand, gives us the music of the mighty organ, with its full-toned peals and volumes of majestic sound. Shakespeare exhibits universality of range. His spirit finds a point of contact wherever it goes, Milton has more of the sublime. He soars aloft, and his spirit finds its native air in the highest heavens. Shakespeare seizes upon all men and subjects, Milton is restricted in his range, and only certain types of character properly belong to him. Shakespeare's genius is great in its creative energy, Milton's rather in its moral earnestness. Shakespeare rings oftentimes with a merry laughter, Milton not less seldom quivers with a noble scorn. Shakespeare stands for the secular and profane in the great revival, Milton for the spirit of Christianity in the same. Shakespeare found many dark problems in his survey of life, but he had, or at least he offered, no solution, Milton was faced with the same riddles of existence, but he had a remedy to offer, or a relief in the gloomy hour, with the glorious story of Redemption and the immortal hope thus given to man. And one result of this is that Milton is already to a certain extent out of date. The world has outgrown his narrow, Puritan view of life, and so he is far less read than Shakespeare. Yet he is a giant-figure in the world's literature. Even if his theology became an obsolete superstition, his ethical purposes, inflamed as they were by

an empyrean imagination, are those which gave motive to the *Agamemnon* or *King Lear*. He had not the Shakespearean humour and impartiality, but he had the zeal of the Christian whetted by the conflicts of Puritan England.

CHAPTER V

Seventeenth Century Prose—II

John Bunyan His Writings *Pilgrim's Progress*, *Holy War*,
Mr Badman, *Grace Abounding* Baxter and Fox Barrow
and South Izaak Walton Cowley Temple Clarendon
Philosophical Writers Hobbes, Locke Personal
Memoirs Lucy Hutchison, Evelyn, and Pepys

- 1651 Hobbes' *Leviathan*
- 1653 Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler*
- 1678 Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (First Part)
- 1684 *Pilgrim's Progress* (Second Part)
- 1690 Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.
- 1818 Evelyn's *Diary* first published
- 1825 Pepys' *Diary* first published

1. **John Bunyan** → After Milton, Bunyan is the most considerable literary figure of the seventeenth century, as he is also the next most important literary exponent of the religious temper of Puritan England. In modern history he is by far the most remarkable instance of a literary genius who, born in humble life, receiving the barest rudiments of learning in his boyhood, all his life living next door to poverty, brought forth in the pure Doric of his native tongue a book instinct with the spirit not merely of his own time or people, but of world-wide humanity, and instantly recognised as such into whosoever hands it may fall. Few, comparatively, of the English-speaking races of to-day are altogether unacquainted by family tradition or at first hand

with this immortal writing, and assuredly none but such as these will discount this high praise

John Bunyan was born in the neighbourhood of Bedford in 1628, and became, in the manner of his father, a "tinker." Poor though his parents were, he tells us, "it pleased God to put it into their hearts to put me to school, to learn me both to read and write, the which I also attained, according to the rate of other poor men's children." But, undoubtedly, the more important part of his education was received in his humble home, where he received the rudiments of religious knowledge. To a child of his abnormally active imagination, this instruction was far the most important element in the foundations of his later mental and spiritual life. He must also have acquired a considerable knowledge of the Bible in his early years—another very important factor in the development of so imaginative a man. He himself tells us that he lived a wild and dissolute youth. But it is more than probable that his estimation of the sinfulness of his early years is couched in language which has the rich descriptiveness of his ~~more allegorical and imaginative work~~. He took the ~~field for a short time at the outbreak of the Civil War; on which side he does not tell us.~~ Later, he tells us that his "mercy was to light upon a wife whose father was counted godly." They married, though "without so much household stuff as a dish or a spoon betwixt" them. But his bride brought with her two small books, the *Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven* and the *Practice of Piety*, which they read together, and which exercised a powerful influence upon his life. The spiritual conflict which followed upon this reading is described by Bunyan with great power in his *Grace Abounding*. Finally, he found peace under the instruction of John Gifford, minister of the newly formed community of "independents" in religion, who in 1650 formed themselves into a

church, now known as Bunyan Meeting, Bedford Bunyan soon became a preacher, and in 1656 his first book appeared, entitled *Some Gospel Truths Opened*. The restoration of Charles compelled local magistrates, however unwilling, to reinforce the Act of Uniformity, and in November 1660 Bunyan found himself in the county gaol. This imprisonment, sometimes little more than nominal, at other times more severe, lasted twelve years. Other books were issued during this period, among them his *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, a piece of autobiography of astonishing quality. After his release he became, under the Declaration of Indulgence, a licensed preacher, and pastor of his church in Bedford. In 1675 the Declaration of Indulgence was withdrawn, and again Bunyan was imprisoned, this time for six months, in the town gaol on Bedford Bridge. During this imprisonment (as Dr Brown, Bunyan's most learned biographer, almost certainly proves), he wrote the first part of *Pilgrim's Progress*. In 1680 the *Life and Death of Mr Badman* appeared, and in 1682 *The Holy War*, whilst in 1684 the second part of *The Pilgrim's Progress* was issued. Bunyan died four years later, and was interred in the Nonconformist burial-ground at Bunhill Fields, in London.

Bunyan wrote copiously. Many of his books are no doubt the recollections of his broad utterances in sermons. But he will be always remembered by four of them: *The Pilgrim's Progress*, *The Holy War*, *Mr Badman*, and *Grace Abounding*. The full title of his immortal work is *The Pilgrim's Progress from this World to that which is to come, delivered in the Similitude of a Dream*, by John Bunyan. It appeared in 1678, and a second part followed six years later. The book immediately became famous, and many thousands of copies were sold in the author's lifetime. Countless editions have since appeared, and the book has been translated into more languages than any

other printed book except the Bible. Let the book be given into the hands of a child ever so young, if he can but read, and its story will grip his imagination and hold him enchanted, and such a child in his latest years will return repeatedly to the book of his childhood, always again to come under its spell. And the learned and wise can no less withhold their admiration from the book, nor refuse to place it high in the roll of honour in the world's literature.

What is its title to be called literature? What are the secrets of its never-failing charm? To take the second question first: the story has all the realism which its narration could receive from a pen which was the instrument of an imagination whose creations stood out vividly and distinctly, and which breathed into those creations the breath of life. Christian, with his burden on his back, is a real man, and Evangelist, who meets him on his way, is an exact picture of a man whom we all have seen for ourselves and heard. Everyone of us has been to Vanity Fair, we have all met and talked with Ignorance and Hopeful, Talkative and Money-Love. We have all walked in meadows as delightful as those in which Christian and his companions walked and rested and slept, we all have seen, or heard, or read, of castles like that in which Giant Despair held the unhappy pilgrims in his vile dungeon. The very names of the characters and places Bunyan describes, are pictures in themselves. We should recognise the story even without description. The action of the story never fails, and the pace the pilgrims make exactly suits us as we accompany them. We are glad to linger with them in the House Beautiful, or to hurry with them with all speed from Doubting Castle. The story has all the reality in it which the boy finds when he first reads *Robinson Crusoe*, or follows Swift in the relation of *Gulliver's Travels*. The moment

we see the pilgrim in rags setting out with his burden, we become interested in his fortunes, and our interest never flags until we have seen him fairly within the gates of the Celestial City. Moreover, the story is told in such simple language as to be understood by the simplest reader, whilst, in spite of the fact that it is an allegorical treatment of matters fundamental to the Christian religion, it tells the spiritual experiences of a man to whose heart every reader finds a counterpart within his own breast. This leads us to attempt the answer to our first question. The book ranks with the highest literature mainly because of the purity of the language its writer uses, and the perfection of his art in the employment of that instrument. Bunyan writes in the purest Saxon-English as he had learned it by his daily use and reading of the English Bible. He knew no other tongue, nor needed any. His is the language in which, with simplicity, directness, and the inimitable charm which is always added to those qualities, the story of the early books of Genesis and the narrative of the evangelists are told.

-The *form* of Bunyan's narrative, no less than its style, gives distinction to the work. It is an allegory with a dream-plot underlying it. It is true that the details do not always hang together. There are incongruities, as there always must be in a long-spun allegory, and especially one which attempts, as this does, to blend so many everyday scenes of earthly life with things spiritual and unseen. But Macaulay makes a good answer to this objection when he says he does "not believe that any man, whatever might be his genius, and whatever his good luck, could long continue a figurative history without falling into many inconsistencies. We are sure that inconsistencies, scarcely less gross than the worst into which Bunyan has fallen, may be found in the shortest and most elaborate allegories of the *Spectator*

and the *Rambler* *The Tale of a Tub* and *The History of John Bull* swarm with similar errors, if the name of error can be properly applied to that which is unavoidable. It is not easy to make a simile go on all-fours. The best thing, on the whole, that an allegorist can do, is to present to his readers a succession of analogies, each of which may separately be striking and happy, without looking very nicely to see whether they harmonise with each other. This Bunyan has done, and the general effect which the tale produces on all persons, learned and unlearned, proves that he has done well." The plot has orderliness of development, the parts follow naturally upon each other, and are correctly related to the whole. There is great beauty in the descriptive passages. Bunyan's descriptions are genuine pictures, life-like and convincing. Though there is great fervour, at times great passion, in his utterances, Bunyan never ceases to be natural, he is never detected in the act of writing merely for effect. Lastly, the book evinces broad sympathies. There is nothing narrow or merely individual in its treatment of the spiritual emotions. "With deepest pathos it enters into the stern battle so real to all of us, into those heart-experiences which make up, for all, the discipline of life."

Next to *The Pilgrim's Progress*, probably *The Holy War* is most popular. Substituting the soul of man (Mansoul) for the Garden of Eden, it may be said, in brief, that the purpose of the book is to tell the same story as had been so magnificently told by Milton in his *Paradise Lost*. Bunyan displays all his former power of realistic description, great ingenuity, not always quite so successfully, is expended upon the plot, but though the story excites and maintains the reader's deepest interest, it does not leave him with the same sense of satisfaction as he finds in reading *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

The Life and Death of Mr Badman was conceived by Bunyan as a book in which he should tell of "the life and death of the ungodly, and of their travel through this world to hell," as he had formerly traced the progress of the pilgrim from this world to glory. Mr Badman is a thoroughgoing scoundrel, of whom Wiseman tells his neighbour Attentive as they talk together of the passing bell which yesterday tolled for him in his passing from life to death. The narrative of Badman's life is seriously interrupted by long dissertations on lying, swearing, stealing, impurity, and the like, which, good enough in themselves, break in unduly upon the course of the story. Nevertheless, it is an excellent piece of work, and gives us a life-like picture of such vulgar men as Bunyan may well have known in his day in Bedford, or have met in his extensive preaching tours. Bunyan moves, as always, among living men, his feet are on the solid earth. So life-like is this picture of Badman, so universal is the type, that we think we see him, even as Christian is also readily found in our own experience. The simplicity and naturalness of the dialogue between Attentive and Wiseman often forcibly remind us of old Izaak Walton's charm in the same style of writing.

Grace Abounding gives Bunyan a place in the rank of St Augustine and St Thomas à Kempis. It tells truthfully of the heartrending agony of a seventeenth century sinner who, under the Puritanical teaching of his day, is led to face his sin and to seek salvation, consolation and comfort, by availing himself of "the blessed privilege to flee to Jesus Christ for mercy." It is a faithful transcript of the experiences of a rare soul conscious of its frailty in the discharge of its highest duty toward God, yet ever struggling to bring itself into vital union with the Divine Spirit, and to govern its actions in conformity with the Divine Will, to the perfecting and purifying of its

life Thus it remains true to the innermost experience of men to this day, though its doctrinal setting may remain only as a record of the faith of his own day and Church

Contemporary with Bunyan, **George Fox** (1624-90) was also a dreamer of dreams, he saw visions, and attempted to describe them His *Journal* is written in simple language, and is sometimes eloquent, but on the whole his writing is turgid and harsh One other representative of the Nonconformists deserves mention—**Richard Baxter** (1651-91) His style is colloquial, his homeliness is refreshing, and his racy autobiography still makes interesting reading, though probably the *Saint's Everlasting Rest* is his most popular book Orthodox divinity is also not wanting in his contributions to the greater prose literature of the period, and we cannot leave quite unmentioned such great masters of theological exposition as the learned **Isaac Barrow** (1630-87) and the eloquent **Robert South** (1634-1716)

2 Izaak Walton—His singularly gracious and pious spirit, and the charm of quietness that surrounds his life, make this perhaps the best place to mention Izaak Walton (1593-1683). Without any splendid gifts of eloquence, Walton justly claims high place for the imperishable grace of his style in the *Compleat Angler* The book is a complete revelation of the spirit of the writer—the spirit of quietness and simplicity of mind, sweet content, and sincere piety It relates the friendly discourse of Piscator (the Fisherman), Auceps (a Falconer), and Venator (a Hunter), who meet by chance on Tottenham Hill on a fine, fresh May morning They are as cheerful as the day, and the book keeps up the good cheer to its last page Each agrees to commend to the other his favourite pastime, but of course Auceps and Venator are really introduced in order

that Piscator may be thrown apart from them in favourable contrast. The sweet poetry of nature is on every page of the writing, and the heart that is stirred with a feeling for the beauties of earth and sky thus revealed to it, turns with unaffected simplicity and pious gratitude to the great God above them all. Walton must be remembered also for his delightful *Lives*. These are brief and exquisitely simple, but they are perfect miniature portraits. The first composed was a *Life of Dr Donne*. There followed *Lives* of Sir Henry Wotton, Richard Hooker, George Herbert, and Bishop Sanderson.

3 Clarendon — The seventeenth century boasts of one great historian, whose history of the rebellion in England will always remain one of the great treasures of the period, even if, as some historians say, it cannot always be relied on for an impartial relation of the historical facts. This work fell from the pen of Edward Hyde, Earl of Clarendon (1608-74). Intended for the Church, he left Oxford to practise law. He made rapid progress in his profession, but loved letters better than law. Charles made him Chancellor of the Exchequer (1643). A year or two later he left England for Jersey, and during the Commonwealth remained at the court of Charles the Second. At the Restoration he became Earl of Clarendon and High Chancellor. He was an upright adviser of his king, but gradually fell into such unpopularity that he was compelled to leave the country, and he spent the last seven years of his life in exile in France. In this period he completed his *History of the Rebellion*, begun in 1646. This is the work which entitles him to fame, though he also wrote a *History of the Civil War in Ireland*, and his own *Life*. His great powers of description and a certain stateliness of style give distinction to Clarendon's history, but his highest praise is as a writer of portraiture. Here he is at high-water mark. No writer has

succeeded to a greater degree in bringing vividly before his reader just the portrait of the living man whom he undertakes to describe. In spite of his royalist bias, his portrait of Cromwell is masterly, and he has conducted the whole narrative with a temperance and dignity that will make it endure. It is a rare piece of living history.

4 Philosophical Writers—Seventeenth century English prose is adorned with the writings of two great philosophers—Hobbes and Locke. Others in a more extended work might deserve fuller mention, especially those of the famous school of Cambridge Platonists, with Henry Moore and Ralph Cudworth in their midst, but even then, their mention would have larger reference to their place in the development of philosophical opinion in England, than to the literary expression of those opinions. And even in respect of Hobbes and Locke there is a difference. Both equally deserve their high position for their eminence as philosophical thinkers, but Hobbes is the more considerable of the two as a writer of English prose. He thought for himself, and developed his hard doctrines much more by the powerful aid of his own reflections than by reference to the writings of others, and when he wrote he could find a nervous style with which, in terse, direct, and unmistakably clear language, he could express himself.

Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) stands midway between Bacon and Locke in the line of English thinkers. His long life, which began in the year of the Spanish Armada, stretched almost to the coming of William of Orange. His philosophic and literary activities culminated in the publication in 1651 of his famous work, entitled *Leviathan*. Thus we may consider him as especially belonging to the revolutionary times. Great was the upheaval of thought in these years, not alone in the large department of life which is

occupied with political, civil, and religious affairs, but in that other great department of philosophical and scientific opinion. In astronomy, the Copernican theory was firmly establishing itself, and, aided by the really scientific genius of Kepler and Newton, was laying secure foundations for the researches of future generations. In mathematics, Napier, with his invention of logarithms, and the immortal Sir Isaac Newton, with his great work in mathematics and physics—to name no others—were setting afoot equally wide-reaching developments. Moreover, let us give Charles the Second all the credit he deserves for the encouragement he gave to science, when he gave his practical blessing to the infant Royal Society in 1662. Researches initiated on Bacon's method of observation, hypothesis, and verification now began to lay the broad foundations of modern physical and biological science, and such great discoverers and inquirers as William Harvey (d. 1657), who first demonstrated the circulation of the blood, and Robert Boyle, the natural philosopher, belong to the period. In the wider and more comprehensive field of general philosophy, Descartes in France was preparing the foundations of a new school of thought. At home, Thomas Hobbes was the one great Englishman who attempted, by the exercise of speculative thought, to construct a complete philosophical system which should embody the rationale of the phenomena of the universe and of man, as they presented themselves to the observer of his age. Hobbes is the great exponent and defender of absolutism. Living in such times as his, he was compelled to observe his country, as he says, "boiling over with questions concerning the rights of dominion and obedience due from subjects." The question thus forced upon his mind was "What is sovereignty?" Hence springs that part of his philosophic system which deals with the State, and which is described in his *Leviathan*,

the book in which we are most interested, though it expounds only a part of his philosophical system. That system, as he conceived it, was to be as complete and comprehensive as Herbert Spencer in recent times aimed at making his Synthetic Philosophy. A thoroughly original thinker, consistent and fearless in deducing his conclusions, Hobbes created immense stir in the world of thought of his day. It could hardly be otherwise. With resistless logic he proves the inviolability of the right of subjects to resistance. Published in 1651, men taunted Hobbes with having produced his *Leviathan* as a panegyric upon the system of Oliver Cromwell, and to gain the Protector's favour by proving his right to that position. Nor was the bitter tongue always silenced with the philosopher's quiet reply that since Oliver Cromwell did not become Lord Protector until 1653, it was to little purpose that in 1651 a book should be published approving his appointment to that post. Again, so doughty a fighter in the cause of the divine right of kings was properly received into royal favour when the "Merry Monarch" came to his own, and we need not be surprised that again the philosopher was taunted by those who thought they saw in self-interest the underlying motive in his own life, as indeed he proved it to be with human nature generally in that department of his philosophical system which treated of ethics. But the truth is that Hobbes thought fearlessly for himself, and with equal fearlessness expressed his opinions freely, having the genuine purpose of the born philosopher. In fact, Hobbes could hardly expect to please anyone with his system. Looked upon blankly as materialistic in general philosophy, for an absolute government in politics, deterministic in his ethics, and atheistic in religion, Hobbes did much to determine the activities of the English philosophers who were to follow him for the next century or more, even if

this were only by negation. But a history of philosophy must tell more of this. His interest for ourselves after all, chiefly lies in his gifts of expression, by which he was enabled to write what he thought in plain and unadorned yet always forceful prose. He had something to say, and he knew how to say it so that his meaning could not be misunderstood. In this respect his style has rare excellence. His sentences and paragraphs are well constructed, his bright and pithy sayings smite the understanding with unerring effect, and were it not for some quaintness in the terms of expression it would not be difficult for a reader to suppose himself engaged with the writings of a nineteenth century author.

John Locke (1632-1704) is the third great English thinker of the seventeenth century. His title to fame rests more securely upon his achievements as a philosopher than as a writer of English prose, in which, though he could express himself aptly, and therefore could derive an advantage for his philosophy from his clear and unadorned diction, he does not exhibit any of the characteristics of a great writer. In this he stands below his two great predecessors, Bacon and Hobbes. As a philosopher, his reputation is at least equal to theirs in the breadth of his ideas, and in his personal character he was greater than either of them, while his influence upon posterity has probably been greater than theirs. Passing from Westminster School to Christ Church, Oxford, he ultimately became lecturer on Greek and rhetoric there. But his mind displayed a bent toward scientific investigation based on the Baconian method of induction. Though he never took a degree in medicine, he practised for some time. Becoming acquainted with Lord Ashley, afterwards Earl of Shaftesbury, an intimate friendship resulted, which persisted until Shaftesbury's death in 1683. Political considerations made it

necessary for him to reside abroad for some years, but the Revolution in 1688 gave him freedom to return, and he received an appointment as Commissioner of Appeals. Locke was essentially a moderate and a sound man, tolerant and calm. He was highly valued by William III and his ministers, and, along with Sir Isaac Newton, he was consulted as an expert in the reform of the current coinage. He was the typical philosopher, and an admirable personality besides. In 1690 he published the work which secures him his great fame, an *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. He had previously issued an *Essay on Toleration*, and subsequently issued two treatises, *On Civil Government* (1690), and *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693). Locke was engaged upon the composition of his famous essay for well-nigh twenty years. As a Fellow of the Royal Society he was interested in experimental research, and was one of a committee appointed "for considering and directing experiments." On a certain occasion, at an informal meeting with a few friends of kindred interests, he tells us that, discoursing on a subject very remote from this, they "found themselves quickly at a stand by the difficulties that arose on every side. After we had a little while puzzled ourselves, without coming any nearer a resolution of those doubts which perplexed us, it came into my thoughts that we took a wrong course, and that, before we set ourselves upon inquiries of that nature, it was necessary to examine our own abilities, and see what objects our understandings were or were not fitted to deal with. This I proposed to the company, who all readily assented, and thereupon it was agreed that this should be our first inquiry." Thus Locke was led to consider the problems which he discusses in the book, which did not appear until more than eighteen years afterwards. The *Essay* is divided into four books. In the first, Locke dis-

cusses the doctrine of innate ideas, and develops his theory that the "origin, certainty, and extent of human knowledge" depend not upon "innate ideas," but upon "experience." That is to say, all our ideas are based upon the sensations conveyed to us by our senses, and by the ideas which the mind may form by the combination of these sensations. None of these ideas, not even those of space or time, are born *in* the mind; all are the result of our experience. Judgments presuppose ideas, ideas presuppose sensations. Thus, a number of *sensations* together give us an *idea* of a book, let us say, this idea of a *book*, connected with the idea of a *table*, leads to the *judgment* that the book lies on the table. The formation of ideas by the fusion of sensations and the judgments formed from the ideas are processes of the mind; the sensations are, as we may say, the only raw material of the mental processes. In the second book of the *Essay* the doctrine extends into a discussion of the concepts of which the human mind can become conscious. These, however perplex, are resolvable either into "qualities of external things," *i.e.*, sensations, or "operations of our own mind," *e.g.*, reflection. Knowledge, which means the formation of conceptions more and more complex, grows gradually under conditions of experience. The third book deals with language, and the fourth with the problems of certainty of knowledge and its relation to absolute truth. Locke finds in "experience" the ultimate source of all human knowledge; it is by means of the sensations that we receive of the qualities of things, and by the operation of our own spirit upon these materials that we gain such knowledge as we ever can acquire of the world, and by showing that the only certain knowledge obtainable is that based upon experience, Locke dealt the final blow to the absurdities of the scholastic metaphysics. Thus he prepared the way for those two great philosophers of the eighteenth century,

Berkeley and Hume, who more fully developed the doctrine of the experimental philosophers whose system finds its ultimate origin in the dictum of Descartes, *Cogito ergo sum*

5 Personal Memoirs—Our survey of the prose writings of the century will not be complete without reference to the personal memoirs which writers of that time issued, amongst which three are of outstanding interest, viz, those of Mrs Hutchinson, Sir John Evelyn, and Samuel Pepys. **Lucy Hutchinson** (1620- ?) was the wife of Colonel Hutchinson, a God-fearing parliamentarian, who, late in life, was imprisoned in Deal Castle upon suspicion of a complicity in plots against the king, and there died. She was a woman of education and refinement, and her picture of a Puritan gentleman and a Puritan home is a valuable contribution to our knowledge of the social conditions of her times, whilst the affection and artless simplicity revealed in her writing give it an irresistible charm. Sir John Evelyn shares with Samuel Pepys the distinction of classic rank in literature, by their private diaries. **Evelyn** (1620-1706) was a gentleman of easy fortune and with country tastes. His loyalty to the royal cause, together with his good sense and moderation of opinion, made him a *persona grata* at court, and he became one of the most notable social personages of the time. He met and knew everybody, and was interested in everything. He was a voluminous writer, but his literary fame rests upon his *Diary*, with perhaps his *Sylva*. The *Diary* was first published in 1818. It covers a period of seventy years in the most memorable period of our history. Nothing is too trivial for mention, and everything is described with the sedate simplicity of a gentleman of accurate observation. Some of his simple statements of facts of supreme importance have a strange appeal in them. Take, for example, the following.—

10th December 1659—I treated privately with Colonel Morley, then Lieutenant of the Tower, and in great trust and power, concerning delivering it to the king, and the bringing of him in, to the great hazard of my life, but the Colonel had been my school-fellow, and I knew would not betray me

12th January 1660—Wrote to Colonel Morley again to declare for his majesty

11th February 1660—A signal day Monck, perceiving how infamous and wretched a pack of knaves would have still usurped the supreme power, and having intelligence that they intended to take away his commission, repenting of what he had done to the city, and where he and his forces were quartered, marches to Whitehall, dissipates that nest of robbers, and convenes the old Parliament, the Rump Parliament (so called as retaining some few rotten members of the other) being dissolved, and for joy whereof were many thousands of rumps roasted publicly in the streets at the bonfires this night, with ringing of bells and universal jubilee. This was the first good omen

But in spite of its very great interest, Evelyn's *Diary* seems comparatively insignificant when we come to examine that of Samuel Pepys. There is no diary in the world's literature to compare with this, nor any work of a similar character, unless it be Boswell's *Johnson*. And even this comparison is to the advantage of Pepys, for he is Johnson and Boswell gathered into one and the same person. Samuel Pepys (1633-1703) was a distinguished civil servant, who rose from humble life to a position of great eminence and usefulness. His *Diary* covers a period of only a little more than eight years, extending from 1st January 1660 to 31st May 1669, when he writes (owing to an affection of the eyes from which he afterwards recovered), "and thus ends all that I doubt I shall ever be able to do with my own eyes in the keeping of my journal." Pepys is unequalled for the naïvete of his self-revelation. He tells us everything about the happenings of his time

and the people with whom he meets, but most of all about himself. He sets down his vanities and his follies, he tells us his private thoughts, he does not conceal his peccadilloes, he does not omit to record his quarrels and fallings out with Mrs Pepys, he makes a note when he buys his wife a new dress, or himself a coat, he indulges himself with records of his gains, and from time to time sets out the details of his financial position, always with a smack of satisfaction. There is nothing in his style excepting its absolute spontaneity and naturalness. It is the very man himself, with all his foibles and his good points, whom we have depicted on his pages. He wrote in cypher, and never dreamed that posterity would read his story, but when he died he bequeathed his library, which he had got together with much judgment, to Magdalene College, Cambridge. The *Diary* was included, the cypher was discovered early in the nineteenth century, and the book first published, with extensive omissions (many of them necessary), in 1825. We could ill afford to be without it.

These diaries show us, along with the other works mentioned in this chapter, that a prose style adapted to general use has been acquired. Dryden, the professional man of letters, will round off this accomplishment, and the eighteenth century writers will take advantage of this bequest from the seventeenth to develop the literature of daily and periodical journalism. The prose-writer of the new century will have no excuse to offer for involved syntax or chaotic sentences—he must at least be clear.

CHAPTER VI

Restoration Poetry and Drama

The Change in Poetic Style Cowley Waller Denham
Marvell Davenant Butler's *Hudibras* The Drama
Reopening of the Theatres Influence of the French
Drama Dramatic Poets Otway and Lee Playwrights
The Rehearsal The Comedists The School of Molière
Sir George Ethieridge Wycherley Vanbrugh Farquhar
Congreve

- 1663 Butler's *Hudibras* (First Part)
1672 *The Rehearsal* presented
1693 Congreve's first Comedy, the *Old Bachelor*
1700 Congreve's last Comedy, *The Way of the World*

1. The Change in Poetic Style — It is a remarkable phenomenon that the character of English poetry, in the lapse of the seventeenth century, should have so completely changed from the imaginative richness which it displayed in the reign of Elizabeth to the artificial and rhetorical form it assumed in the age of Anne. Without attempting formal explanation, we can distinctly trace the course of the change in the succession of poets already studied or now to be reviewed. We have, in the poetry of the two middle quarters of the seventeenth century, as it were, the mingling of the waters. According to the peculiarities of their temperament or their circumstances, we find the poets of this period still adhering to the old, as Milton and Marvell (omitting his Satires) and the later of the poets studied in Chapter II, whilst

others, as Waller and Denham, pass over entirely to the new Others, again, bear traces of both streams of tendency chief among these is Abraham Cowley

Cowley (1618-67) showed great precocity as a poet, and early in life became the most popular of living English poets He was an ardent Royalist, and suffered accordingly Disappointed of reward at the Restoration, he retired in disgust, and confined himself for the rest of his life to his studious pleasures Such was his reputation, that he was buried in state in Westminster Abbey, laid by the remains of Chaucer and Spenser But his fame speedily declined His early poetry attempted the style and feeling of his great lyrical predecessors, but his love is expressed with much coldness and is weighted with euphuistic phrases, whilst his poetry is chiefly engaged upon forced conceits *The Mistress* (1647), a collection of love poems, is rendered impossible by the unnatural ingenuity and the clever affectation of the verse — Cowley drives the metaphysical method of Donne to excess, and he is seriously treated by Johnson as the chief of his clan But it is more just to observe that such an absurd misuse of great learning and skill withdraws Cowley from the courts of poetry altogether The satire of the *Spectator* probes, as usual, to the core of the matter, and we may well quote what Addison has to say about these love poems, with the assurance that he is by no means unjust to Cowley

Cowley, observing the cold regard of his mistress's eyes, and at the same time their power of producing love in him, considers them as burning-glasses made of ice, and finding himself able to live in the greatest extremities of love, concludes the torrid zone to be habitable When his mistress has read his letter writ in juice of lemon by holding it to the fire, he desires her to read it over a second time by love's flames When she weeps, he wishes it were inward heat that distilled these drops from the limbec When she is absent, he is beyond eighty, that is thirty degrees nearer the pole than when she is with

him His ambitious love is a fire that naturally mounts upward, his happy love is the beams of heaven, and his unhappy love the flames of hell When it does not let him sleep, it is a flame that sends up no smoke His heart is an Aetna that, instead of Vulcan's shop, encloses Cupid's forge in it Love, in another place, cooks pleasure at his fire Sometimes he is drowned in tears and burnt in love, like a ship set on fire in the middle of the sea

Such a love is fantastical and witty enough, but it is not so sincere as John Lyly's, Cowley's fashion is a disease worse than euphuism, and it is not surprising that we modern readers object to the task of unravelling its intricate involutions In 1656 he published a sacred epic in four books, most of it written in his Cambridge days, entitled *Daviders*, which deserves mention chiefly because it is written in the heroic couplets then fast becoming the established verse form He employs the same metre with much success in his poem, *On the Death of Mr Crashaw* Cowley also wrote a number of "Pindarique Odes"—lyrics composed of lines of irregular length, after the manner of Pindar Almost all these are uninteresting in themselves, but they exercised considerable influence on the poets of Cowley's day, who freely imitated them We owe to these experiments the really great odes of Dryden, Gray, Collins, and Wordsworth, to say nothing of the efforts in the same manner of the great poets of a still later day But while Cowley was trying to make far-fetched conceits the basis of poetry, Milton was showing that the most sublime poetry should be at once "simple, sensuous, and impassioned" Cowley wrote remarkably good prose, for which, if we are not mistaken, he is more noteworthy than for his poetry, for the prose is as natural and lucid as the poetry is metaphysical and false

Edmund Waller (1605-87) has left us verse remarkable for its grace and sweetness. That of his earliest years deserves a high place in the work

of the last Elizabethans His love poems, chiefly addressed to Lady Dorothea Sidney, the Sacharissa whose hand he long sought but did not gain, are ingenious and elegant, and display great power in their composition, they are more successful than Cowley's, but, like his, they are wanting in warmth and colour His most successful lyric effort is in the *Song to the Rose*

Go, lovely rose,
Tell her that wastes her time and me,
That now she knows
When I resemble her to thee
How sweet and fair she seems to be

Waller was second only to Cowley in the estimation of his time, but, like Cowley's, his reputation speedily declined after his death. He cultivated consciously a very smooth and easy-flowing diction, for which he was highly praised by poets of the correct style. But smoothness no more than cleverness can make poetry, Waller deceived his contemporaries as much as Cowley had done, and, by starting poets upon the quest of an elegantly "correct" deportment in verse, he laid the foundation of the eighteenth century school of versified prose. Dryden learned much from Waller, Dryden begat Pope, and Pope begat the rest. Waller's real claim to fame lies in this introduction of the rimer couplet into English poetry. For twenty years he practised this mechanic art of versification alone. Sir John Denham then became his disciple, and through him, though he is now remembered only for his poem entitled *Cooper's Hill*, the tradition was established which we follow in a long line of poets from Dryden and Pope onwards to the end of the eighteenth century.

2 **Andrew Marvell** (1621-78) was a popular member of the Republican party who, being approved by his great learning and honourable

conduct, was associated with Milton in the Latin Secretaryship toward the end of the Commonwealth. He sat in Richard Cromwell's Parliament as member for Hull, and represented that constituency till his death. His poetry falls into two distinct classes—his earlier and lyric verses, and his later (chiefly) satirical work. The former has the general characteristics of the poetry produced in the earlier half of the century, whilst the latter throws him into close relationship with the poets of the Restoration. His lyrical poetry gives him great distinction among the later lyrists of the romantic age, whilst he gained equal distinction among the satirists of the post-Restoration period. In his best lyrics, such as *The Garden* and *A Drop of Dew*, he shows a wonderfully sympathetic insight into nature, and great depth of feeling, but he does not always maintain his high level. *The Ode on Cromwell* cannot conclusively be proved to be his, though it almost certainly is, it is in any case one of the finest poems of its kind in the language. Its dignity and restraint are most admirably fitted to the subject of the poem. Politico-satirical writing, by its very nature, is unlikely to secure lasting fame, the subjects under ridicule being usually persons or events whose importance passes away with them. Marvell's satirical poems share the common fate, but in their day and generation Marvell's satires, by their wit and stinging force, commanded respect or excited fear. He could throw them off with great rapidity, and they always hit the mark. Marvell could also write good Latin verse in the manner of his great master, John Milton, of whom he was a sincere admirer, and whom, in his lighter vein, he followed not far off.

3 Butler's Hudibras.—Another poet of great reputation, by no means exhausted to-day, is **Samuel Butler (1612-80)**. His fame rests upon his *Hudibras*, of which he published three parts. It is a huge,

vigorous, and well-sustained satire, chiefly on the Puritans, upon whom, now that their sun has set, Butler pours all his withering scorn and violent hate. He employs the uncommon octo-syllabic verse with rare success, the form being well suited in his hands to the quick turns of his wit and his expressive utterances—often almost explosive in their vehemence. Our interest in the Puritan survives to this day, and this, added to Butler's wealth of illustration, forcible argument, and biting wit, has secured a survival of interest in his satire. Much of it still makes good reading. Butler doubtless found the inspiration for his poem—but nothing more—in the *Don Quixote* of Cervantes, which had recently been given to the world in an English dress. Innumerable quotations and witticisms from his work have passed current into our language, and Butler has given us probably the best burlesque poem in English.

The last survival in the seventeenth century of the lyrical outburst of its early years appears in the verses of some of the most dissolute members of the dissolute court of the last Stuart kings: **Sir Charles Sedley** (1639-1701), **Sackville, Earl of Dorset** (1637-1705), and **John Willmott, Earl of Rochester** (1647-80), have left us songs of genuine lyrical power. They knew how to sing with much sweetness, and when they could restrain their voluptuous feeling and indecent speech, they proved themselves capable of writing verse powerfully expressive of pure and lofty emotion. But too often their work is so blotted as to become unreadable. With lyric gifts of equal splendour, **Dillon, Earl of Roscommon** (1634-85), must be placed in the same class with these. He "only boasts unspotted lace." Though unfortunately undeserving of the same approval, one woman at least here deserves mention. **Aphra Behn** (1642-89) wrote voluminously, and for years lived

by her pen. Beside a long list of plays, eight novels, various poems, and miscellaneous writings must be set down to her account. In contrast with the uninspiring quality of most of her verses, there are outbursts of astonishing lyrical power. But, unhappily, even she could not rise superior to the moral turpitude of the writers of her generation, and, in common with that of her companions, much of her work, however admirable, is necessarily left unread. In this band of lyricists, we have a last outburst of flame from the lyric fires which had burned so steadily earlier in the century. After them, nothing in the genuine lyrical vein was produced for full a hundred years.

4 Restoration Drama — Puritanism, whose spirit was entirely foreign to what it would call the profanity of dramatic representations, achieved its final triumph over the stage by an ordinance of the Lords and Commons, issued in September 1642, that "public stage plays shall cease and be forborne. Instead of which are recommended to the people of this land, the profitable and seasonable considerations of repentance, reconciliation and peace with God, which probably will produce outward peace and prosperity, and bring again times of joy and gladness to these nations." In 1647 this ordinance was repeated, and again in the year following, with stringent additions of pains and penalties against those who should disobey. In 1656 Sir William Davenant obtained permission to produce an Entertainment of Declamations of Music, at Rutland House, and shortly afterwards he presented The Siege of Rhodes, an opera — the first in England. But it was not until August 1660 that he obtained authority to open a public theatre in London. Thus the theatres were closed for a period of eighteen years, and when they reopened, there was but one survivor of the old dramatic school, James Shirley, and his work as a playwright had been ended by the closing of the theatres.

Davenant (1606-69) was the real link between the two periods of dramatic production. He maintained a lively recollection of the manner of the masters who were past and gone, and strove to give to the age of Dryden the traditions of the great drama of his youthful days. Neither his plays nor his poems are of such merit as to detain us by their study here. His labours on behalf of play-acting, rather than his writings for the play-actors, entitle him to our respect and gratitude.

The Restoration and the reopening of the theatres were accompanied by an immediate and clamant demand for theatrical amusement. Writers of plays were found not wanting. The tastes of the people came rapidly into correspondence with the tastes of the court, and these could not tolerate the Elizabethan drama except in its later spicy form. Beaumont and Fletcher, not Shakespeare, had the honour of revival. Old times were gone, old manners changed, new modes of dramatic expression and new standards of dramatic excellence were found in the French tragedies and comedies of Corneille and Molière. The court was lively and licentious; its comedies must be the same. Charles the Second and his courtiers were fond of all things French. Dramatists must seek in France their new standards and their up-to-date methods of dramatic expression. And surely the tragedies of Corneille and Racine and the comedies of Molière were not unworthy to become the stimulus of a new dramatic age in England. In their choice of an heroic subject-matter, in the austere purity of their moral tone, in the elevated grandeur of their verse, no English tragic poet can follow Corneille or Racine at any reasonable distance. Even Dryden could not be witty without coarseness, nor heroic without bombast, nor sublime without false exaggeration. Molière is not immoral and unscrupulous, like Congreve, he could

deal with love questions without a repulsive thought. The literary instinct which drove our Restoration dramatists to Corneille and Molière was correct and worthy, but they were swamped by the impurity, the frivolity, the lack of seriousness, which degraded the Stuart court. Dryden might write heroic romances in imitation of Corneille, but the nation is not with him, and—he must live! It is, therefore, a very degraded French drama that we have to disclose, and we shall do it with as much brevity as possible. The triumphs achieved by the masterpieces of the French stage must be repeated somehow upon the English stage. We must, however, notice that the Spanish drama was not without its influence upon our post-Restoration dramatists; it is chiefly responsible for the bewildering excess of detail in many of their plots, and for their fine-spun intrigues. This influence was reduced, under the influence of Molière, in the plays of Congreve, whose plots are comparatively simple.

5 Dramatic Poets—The supreme place as a dramatist in this period belongs to **John Dryden**, who shares the honours as a dramatic poet with only two authors, Thomas Otway and Nathaniel Lee. The dramas of these three comprised all that this period produced of dramatic poetry worthy of remembrance. These men strove in their play-writing to produce literature, and hence approached their task with a loftier conception of their aim than many of their later contemporaries and successors, who were playwrights pure and simple. Treatment of Dryden's work as a dramatist is given in the chapter specially assigned to that writer. We therefore proceed at once to discuss Otway and Lee. Thomas Otway (1651-85), unlike Dryden, was a dramatist by nature, and his genius was cast in the tragic mould. The son of a clergyman, and educated at Oxford, he made his way from the university to

the London stage. He was a failure as an actor, and his first play, *Alibiades* (1675), was a failure too. But it secured him the support of Rochester and other patrons of the drama. *Don Carlos*, based upon a French novel, achieved a success the next year. A brief and unfortunate enlistment as a soldier followed. Fighting desperately with poverty, and suffering the pangs of heart-breaking love for a beautiful actress who rejected his advances, in 1680 he produced *The Orphan*, a tragedy in which he rises superior to all his contemporaries. The pathos of this play has the true tragic grip, and undoubtedly is a reflection of the emotions by which his own heart was torn. The plot is powerful, turning upon the deception of Monimia, who is beloved by two brothers, and is betrayed by the deception practised upon her by the rejected lover, who personates his successful rival. Throughout the play there are delightful touches in the poetry, which in places reveals a feeling strange to the poetry of the Restoration.

In *Venice Preserved* (1682) Otway achieves a yet higher success in tragedy, though the poetry has not the same graceful simplicity. Jaffier is the affectionate husband of Belvidera, whom her father, a senator, disowns because of her marriage. Reduced to beggary, his need and his desire to avenge himself on his father-in-law lead him to join in a conspiracy against the State at the persuasion of his best-beloved friend, Pierre, a man of much firmer resolution than himself. But his tender love for Belvidera aids her in extracting from him the fact of the plot which, if successful, involves the death of all the senators, including her father. Under her persuasion he renounces the conspiracy, and confesses all to the senate. The promise he receives, that the lives of the conspirators, including his friend Pierre, shall be spared is not kept. Hence the drenching sorrows of the closing scenes of the

tragedy There is unmistakable genius in the telling of the piece The movement is rapid, and makes directly for the tragic end Such is the tension of the feelings excited, that the comic scenes inserted, gross as they are, give welcome relief Even so, the play is capable of affecting the spectator almost to agony

Otway's life of poverty and unhappiness came to a premature end, some say by starvation, others by the fever of fatigue

Nathaniel Lee (1653 ?-92) was no more fortunate in life than Otway, and his life of poverty and intemperance was ended by his being stifled in the snow when returning drunk one night from a tavern Like Otway, he failed as an actor, though he had a great reputation as a dramatic reader Of the plays he wrote, a dozen or more, chiefly on classic themes, his most successful were *The Rival Ladies* (1677) and *Mithridates* (1678) At its best his poetry was of a high order, and in passion he excelled Dryden, and perhaps Otway But he also excelled them too often by his degeneracy into pure rant His blank verse, at its best, has something of the sounding march of Milton, whom he made his model Only a poet could write in such a strain as this, in making declaration of love

No more of this, no more, for I disdain
All pomp when thou art by far be the noise
Of kings and courts from us, whose gentle souls
Our kinder stars have steered another way
Free as the forest-birds we'll pair together,
Fly to the arbours, grots, and flowery meads,
And in soft murmurs interchange our souls,
Together drink the crystal of the stream,
Or taste the yellow fruit which Autumn yields,
And when the golden evening calls us home,
Wing to our downy nest, and sleep till morn

6 Playwrights — A considerable band of the dramatists of the period deserve only to be described

as playwrights. They worked perseveringly, and their plays pleased the theatre-goers, but their work not seldom lacked all trace of originality, and presented but few, if any, of the qualities of literature. **John Crowne** (1640-1703) achieved a deserved success in his comedy, *Sir Courtly Nice*. **Thomas Southerne** (1660-1746) at least made a financial success of his work. **Thomas Shadwell** (1640-92) has good humour, though his plays are but poorly written. Like **Elkanah Settle** (1648-1724), he made good sport for Dryden in his satires.

The Rehearsal—Before passing to the remaining dramatists of our period—the brilliant post-Restoration writers of comedy—we must take note of the appearance in 1672 of *The Rehearsal*, a captivating parody upon the “heroic plays” of the early years of the Restoration. It appeared anonymously and was the work of several hands, though the chief share was undoubtedly that of **George Villiers, Duke of Buckingham** (1627-88), one of the wildest and most riotous of the Merry Monarch’s courtiers. Dryden’s heroic plays are the objects of the parody, especially his *Conquest of Granada*. Bayes personifies Dryden, and doubtless imitates that poet’s personal peculiarities. Meeting two friends, they ask him the plot of his last play. He will not satisfy them, but invites them to come and see it in rehearsal. They accept the invitation and find the piece full of the extravagances of the “heroic plays” they had seen in the last few years. The scenes are pure farce, the satire is biting, the wit sparkling, the parody perfect and unsurpassed, except a century later in the *Critic* by Sheridan (p. 312), and the criticism is discerning and deservedly severe. The play is a work of real genius, and still lives to be read and to afford amusement when the plays which it parodies have long since been forgotten.

7 **The School of Molière**—The English drama

of the second half of the century took largely of the fashion of the French drama, which was then at its highest pitch of excellence. In the tragedies and tragic-comedies of the dramatic writers already studied in this chapter, we may trace the considerable influence of the style and spirit of the great French dramatists Corneille and Racine. It was from these dramatists that Dryden and his companion artists of the drama took their models for the heroic plays which had so large a vogue in the first ten or fifteen years after the return of Charles the Second. The brilliant school of French tragedy founded by these men was almost immediately succeeded by a yet more brilliant school of French comedy, of which the brightest star was Molière, the greatest writer of comedy in modern literature. His wit played about men and upon the manners of his own day, the whims and oddities of manner—ordinary and extraordinary—of the men and women of his time were the subjects of the healthy laughter which his comedies excited. Though they did not rise to his eminence in the excellence of their productions, though they could not emulate the sparkle and vivacity of his wit, though they could not put quite the same geniality and wholesomeness into the laughter they excited, ~~the pupils in our English school of the "Comedy of Manners" consciously imitated their French masters and, at their best, produced comedies which have only once since been surpassed in English, and one or two of which at least have held the stage almost to our own days~~

Sir George Etherridge (1634-91) wrote plays which possess a lightness and grace in strong contrast with the harshness and horse-play of his predecessors. He is distinctly ~~the forerunner of the English school of comedy writers, and led the way for~~ William Wycherley (1640-1715), the greatest of them all ~~save Congreve~~. Wycherley was the son of a country gentleman attached to the royal cause, and

was sent in boyhood to France, where his education would at least not be tainted by the Puritan influences which were then in the ascendant at home. He returned a fine gentleman and a Roman Catholic, well fitted to take the part of a gay young man of the town. He himself said that his four comedies, *Love in a Wood*, *The Chief Dancing Master*, *The Plain Dealer*, and *The Country Wife*, were written in these early years, but if so, they can hardly have been published without revision. *Love in a Wood* was not acted until 1672, and the remaining plays appeared in 1673, 1675, and 1677. With these presentations Wycherley ended his brilliant career as a dramatist. Later he had the misfortune to be put in prison for debt, and remained there for some years forgotten, though his plays still held the stage. One night, James the Second, then king, chanced to be at a performance of *The Plain Dealer*, with which he was so well pleased that he asked for the author, and, learning his misfortune, determined to pay his debts, and settled upon him a pension of £200 a year. Thereafter Wycherley was able to keep a respectable style of living. He never tried dramatic composition again, but strove nervously for fame as a poet by the production of great quantities of doggerel verse. Its style is hardly less worthless than its morals. The characteristics of Wycherley's plays are the extreme cleverness of the dialogue and their degraded morals. It is hardly too much to say that he sacrificed everything for these.

Sir John Vanbrugh (1664-1726), an architect by profession, found sufficient leisure in his early years to write several comedies which were successful on the stage. His humour is rich, often more so than that of Congreve himself, though he is less witty. He knew well, also, how to manage his plots for effect. **George Farquhar (1678-1707)**, handsome, gay, and witty, also contributed several lively comedies.

8 **William Congreve**—But the school derives its greatest glory from the work of **William Congreve** (1670-1729), its most considerable member. Indeed, Congreve is the most conspicuous English dramatist of the last half of the seventeenth century. Born at Bardsey, near Leeds, he was educated in Ireland, and began life in London in 1691, when he entered the Middle Temple. Of good family, ripe scholarship, and abundant wit, two great longings thus early possessed him—to be a man of fashion, and, still more, to win fame as a man of letters. He might reasonably hope to achieve either of these, he attained both. He began writing with a novel, *Incognita, or Love and Duty Reconciled* (1692), published anonymously. This was immediately followed by a translation of the *Eleventh Satire of Juvenal*, which appeared in Dryden's *Juvenal and Persius* (1692). In January 1693 his first comedy, the *Old Bachelor*, appeared with the approving aid of Dryden himself, who said he had never seen such a first play. It was an immense success. Toward the end of the same year the *Double Dealer* appeared. It was a much better piece of work than the *Old Bachelor*, and discerning minds praised it accordingly, but its exposure of the villainy and heartless treachery of the fashionable men of the time was too powerful and outspoken to be altogether pleasing to the idle and callous-hearted men and women who filled Congreve's Theatre, and who belonged to the class of persons chiefly satirised in the play. With the remarkable generosity of praise and the unselfishness conspicuous in the man, Dryden wrote in approbation of this piece, and hailed its author as the first dramatist that had appeared, since the days of Beaumont and Fletcher and Ben Jonson, worthy of comparison with the old masters. Here at last is one, and he a mere boy, who can produce plays to outshine *The Silent Woman* or *The Knight of the Burning Pestle*. Toward the

end of his panegyric, Dryden has some singularly pathetic lines —

Already am I worn with cares and joy,
And just abandoning the ungrateful stage ,
But you, whom over Muse and Grace adorn,
Whom I foresee to better fortune born,
Be kind to my remains , and, oh, defend
Against your judgment your departed friend
Let not the insulting foe my fame pursue
But guard those laurels which descend to you

Congreve's next comedy, *Love for Love* (1695), is generally considered his best, and it was a triumphant success. Next appeared his only tragedy, the *Mourning Bride* (1697). Its first line, "Music has charms to soothe the savage breast," is often quoted, though probably but seldom referred to its author. It will not do to compare this play with the great tragedies of Shakespeare, or even with the best work of Massinger or Ford, but it takes high rank when compared with the tragedies of the age to which it belongs, and those to whom it was presented hailed its author as the greatest tragic as well as the greatest comic dramatist of the time. The play was exceedingly profitable to its writer. His last play, *The Way of the World*, appeared in 1700, but failed to please, though it is little if any inferior to *Love for Love*. Disgusted, Congreve withdrew from the stage and wrote no more. Between the appearance of the *Mourning Bride* and *The Way of the World*, Jeremy Collier, a clergyman of the Church of England, had issued (1698) his *Short View of the Profaneness and Immorality of the English Stage*, in which he violently attacked the playwrights of his time for the indecency of their writings. It was an honest piece of work by a man of conviction in the cause of good taste and good morals, and Congreve never made a greater mistake than when he engaged to defend his plays on moral grounds. Dryden, contrary to general

expectation, did not take up the challenge, though he was the object of vehement attack on the part of Collier. He stood convicted and abashed. Congreve would have done wisely to have followed the same course. Instead, unskilled in the controversial arts, he issued an answer which was unconvincing and a failure. Probably this controversy had something to do with the comparative failure of *The Way of the World*. Whether this be so or not, the fact remains that the brilliant dramatic career of the most brilliant dramatist of his age was closed at the age of thirty years.

Congreve retired with all the glory of his literary achievements on his head. He had not exhausted his great powers, nor declined in success by reason of the decline of his powers. He had means, he had fame, and was now free to avail himself of the abundant opportunities he possessed for the achievement of that other aspiration of his early days in London—to become a man of fashion. His remaining life was a brilliant social success. To judge by his portrait, he must have been a handsome man, with dark eyes flashing fire, he had the good breeding of his gentility, he had the grace and charm which his early years in Ireland and his consequent impregnation with the Celtic spirit gave to his original endowment of wit and humour. As he grew older the infirmities of age took fast hold upon him, and he paid the penalty of the pace he had made in the days of his youth. But he enjoyed the homage of the younger men of letters, who, finding in him no rival to their aspirations for fame, could regard and worship him as a classic. Even Pope need not envy or be jealous of him, he was the generous admirer and friend of any competent writer. So great a figure was he regarded by the younger men of letters, that Pope "passed over peers and statesmen to inscribe his *Iliad*" to him, the richest tribute that any man of letters

of his time could have bestowed upon him. On his death he was buried with great pomp in Westminster Abbey, retaining to the last the fashionable honours he had so keenly desired and so largely secured.

Congreve's position in the brief but brilliant school of English comedy is easily defined. Etheridge laid the foundation of the school by attempting to catch the spirit of the French school of comedy, as he discovered it in the pages of Molière. Wycherley immediately took up the style and gave to it the strength and vigour of his sturdier nature, adding also the stronger spices of his more pungent wit. Congreve immediately followed, and in him there are combined the elegance of the one and the strength of the other of his predecessors, whilst he rose at the same time much nearer to the eminence of the French writer who was the supreme artist in the field. Congreve's learning, combined with his lively imagination, gave greater breadth and a more genial warmth to his treatment of his subjects. Moreover, the effect of his genial wit is greatly enhanced by his delicate fancy, no writer shows a more singular success in his nice choice of words. We are on the threshold of the eighteenth century. Congreve's English style brings us remarkably close to the fine phrasings and lucid simplicity of Addison, and gives us a real foretaste of the delightful charm of the men of the age which was about to dawn. Their wit and humour, their faultless construction, their entertaining plots, and the convincing characterisations of the figures appearing upon their stage, give to the comedies of Congreve the right to live and to be admired to this day, but for their one unpardonable defect they are too truthful a reflection of the immoral age to which they belong. Wycherley's characters are profligates, "the object of their brief existence, the undivided pursuit of lawless gallantry." Their speech betrays

them, there is no purity of affection, no sweetness of life where they live and have their being. Again, to quote Charles Lamb, who says the best that can be said for the dramatists of this school, "there is neither right nor wrong, gratitude or its opposite, claim or duty, paternity or sonship," in the society made up of these men and women. Probably no English dramatist has written dialogue more witty or more sparkling than Congreve's, but his cynical and un-moral view of life must close his plays to all but the student of taste and manners. So true is it, that literature which is not inspired by a lofty ethical motive, which is not—in Matthew Arnold's phrase—in some sense a "criticism of life," cannot tolerate the blows of time. No cleverness, no literary skill, will atone for the absence of the "high seriousness" which is the passport to the courts of the classics. The plays of Congreve are not true to the good and the eternal in humanity, they picture man and woman in a low state of society, ruled by lax morals which we have left behind, they have therefore chiefly a fossil interest, and little more.

CHAPTER VII

Dryden

The Successor to Jonson's Chair Dryden's First Period
Dryden the Playwright The *Conquest of Granada*, The
Characteristics of the "Heroic" Plays Imitations of
Shakespeare Dryden's Comedy *Marriage à la Mode*
Aurungzebe Blank Verse adopted Dryden's Middle
Period *Absalom and Achitophel* *The Medal* *Mac-*
Flecknoe *Religio Laici* *The Hind and the Panther*
Odes Dryden's Last Period The Translations *The*
Fables Dryden's Prose The Dawn of the Eighteenth
Century

- 1631 Dryden born at Aldwinkle, in Northamptonshire
- 1658 Heroic Stanzas on the *Death of Cromwell*
- 1660 *Astræa Redux*
- 1664 *The Indian Queen*, his first real dramatic success
- 1666 *Annus Mirabilis*
- 1670 *The Conquest of Granada*
- 1671 Buckingham's farce, *The Rehearsal*, produced
- 1681 *Absalom and Achitophel*
- 1682 *MacFlecknoe*
The Medal
Religio Laici
- 1687 *The Hind and the Panther*
- 1697 Translation of *Virgil* published.
- 1699 *The Fables*
- 1700 Dryden died

1 The Successor to Jonson's Chair—When Ben Jonson died in 1637, there was no great literary figure whom "the Tribe of Ben" must as a natural necessity elect to occupy his throne Milton, the greatest living writer in the middle part of his

century, aspired to no such kingdom, nor was he fitted by nature or disposition to occupy the position of literary dictator, to command and receive the homage of the wits of his day, or of the aspirants to literary fame. Milton's genius made him a solitary figure in the literary world of his time, and until John Dryden appeared, there was none to assume Ben Jonson's rule. But from 1670 to his death in 1700, Dryden held undisputed sway in the kingdom of English letters. His contemporaries thought him greater than Milton, and though later generations have more correctly judged the relative greatness of the two poets, it is certain that no man could hold for thirty years the place of supremacy in literature unless his talents were noteworthy and his character distinguished. An accomplished versifier, Dryden's wit and intellectual force proved him worthy to be accounted a great poet, his deep and true insight into the qualities of poetry, and his practical acquaintance with the poet's art, gave employment to his pen in the production of critical essays in prose which, had he written nothing else, would make him worthy of an important place in the story of English literature. Add to this his high success, when at his best, in the composition of plays, and we begin to appreciate the extent of his great literary powers, and the strength of the claim he makes upon the attention of the student of our literature.

John Dryden (1631-1700) was born in 1631, in a Northamptonshire village. He passed through Westminster School to Trinity College, Cambridge. In 1657, when Oliver Cromwell was at the height of his power, he settled in London. His first poem of note was written in praise of the Protector, on the occasion of his death. Two years later the Restoration was an accomplished fact, and Dryden's powers of versification were transferred to the cause of the newly returned king. All

his predilections, by birth and family, for the Puritan cause were thrown to the winds, and henceforward he was devoted to the fortunes of the Stuart kings. The Revolution of 1688 reduced him in circumstances, but this only increased his industry—previously considerable—as a writer. A life of toil and strain ceased only when he died. The life of Dryden was, however, as uneventful as the life of the mere writer usually is. He had no heroic blood to give him the fascination of persecution which enriches the life of Milton, he was a plain man, not much better and certainly no worse than the standard man of his time, he was a Tory, and to some extent a time-server. Consequently he arouses no great enthusiasm, but his literary character was sturdy and strong, his mind clear and generous, his aims not at all ignoble. His dramas often share the immorality of the day, but he only succumbed to the current depravity of taste when necessity compelled him, his satires bite shrewdly, but generally deservedly, and his dignified religious poems, his lyrics and his essays, are a sufficient atonement for his other delinquencies. Let us picture Dryden, then, as a man not too squeamish, not heroic, not greatly superior to the moral standpoint of his time, but withal a devoted, skilful, and hard-working servant of literature, one who directed the great stream into a new country, and fertilised the land which was to produce the great men of the eighteenth century.

2 Dryden's First Period (1658-81) — Dryden's first poems of note were his heroic stanzas on the *Death of Cromwell* (1658), and his *Astræa Redux* (1660), a poem on the coronation of Charles the Second. Both are written in heroic verse, and the poet thus early proves his complete mastery of the metre which he was so largely to employ in all his subsequent verse-writing, and which, taken up after him by Pope, was to become the metre regnant in English poetry for

more than a generation. At once Dryden displays the masculine strength and versatility of expression which never failed him. It is not necessary to accuse the poet of double-mindedness on the appearance of his panegyric on Cromwell, and the joyous welcome accorded to Charles the Second less than two years afterwards. His praise of the Lord Protector does not lack sincerity, and its fine feeling is duly tempered with restraint. But the Restoration, when it came, undoubtedly came as the fulfilment of the scarcely concealed desire of the majority of the people, Cromwell had ruled well, but the Puritan ideal was too stern and too austere for average human nature, and Dryden expressed the genuine feeling, not alone of himself, but of the nation, when he gave his poetic welcome to the king. But both these poems, admirable as they are, sank into the shade with the appearance of *Annus Mirabilis* (1666). The Great Plague, followed by the Great Fire in London, temporarily closed the theatres. Relieved from the pressure of the demand for new plays, Dryden could again temporarily turn his attention to non-dramatic poetry, and in this poem of more than 1200 lines he tells of the sea-fighting with the Dutch, and of the awful ruin wrought by the great fire in the City of London. The poem is dedicated to the Lord Mayor and Court of Aldermen, the Sheriffs and Common Council of London, who had so admirably learned to submit themselves "with that humility to the judgments of heaven, and at the same time to raise [themselves] with that vigour above all human energies, to be combated at once from above and from below, to be struck down and to triumph [so that] I know not where such trials have been ever paralleled in any nation, the resolution and successes of them never can be." Pepys bought the poem on 2nd February 1667, and tells us that he was very well pleased that night with reading it, for it was "a very

good poem" Its abundance of illustration, its happy fancy, its felicitous phrasing, entitle it to this praise, but in it Dryden still exhibits, as in his earlier work, a tendency to "concerts" after the manner of Donne and Cowley Though a master-hand is here, it does not yet wield the pen with that perfection of art which a little later is to be revealed, and which the next fourteen years of practice in dramatic poetry enabled it to acquire His next great poem, *Absalom and Achitophel*, is separated from its predecessors by years of grinding toil in the production of plays to please the public of London, and to put much-needed money into his own pocket

3 Dryden the Playwright —Dryden took to play-writing for the simple purpose of earning money and winning public reputation and court favour He had little or no natural impulse towards the creation of dramas, he thought himself but poorly equipped for the undertaking, and he had no particular ambition to excel in this department of literature Of his numerous plays, he tells us that he wrote but one to please himself ' But the Restoration was immediately followed by the reopening of the theatres The court and the public demanded plays, and he who could successfully cater for the popular demand was sure of his pecuniary reward Dryden's first play, *The Wild Gallant*, appeared in 1663, and Pepys, who saw it, declared it "as poor a thing as I ever saw in my life" It was followed by the *Rival Ladies*, hardly more successful; and this, again, by the *Indian Emperor* (1665), which proved very popular, and shares with *Tyrannical Love* and the *Conquest of Granada* (1670) the distinction of being the best example of the English "heroic play"

In plays such as these the attempt was unsuccessfully made to interest the audience in abstractions rather than in real characters, and to present men and women of "heroic" mould rather than men and women

such as the spectators knew and understood by daily converse with them. The methods of Shakespeare and of Ben Jonson were alike ignored, and those of Corneille extolled. For the moment France overcame England. Dryden made the most carefully reasoned attempt to realise the French form of dramatic representation. He says, in describing the character of Almanzor "The first image I had of him was from the *Achilles* of Homer, the next, from Tasso's *Rinaldo* (who was a copy of the former), and the third, from *Artaban* of Monsieur Calprenède, who has imitated them both." The play was, in short, to be a poem, the characters, such as were deserving of epical description. The expression must, therefore, be fitted to these; hence the justification for the employment of "heroic" rime, for "blank verse is acknowledged to be too low for a poem, nay more, for a paper of verses, but if too low for an ordinary sonnet, how much more for tragedy, which is, by Aristotle, in the dispute betwixt the epic poetry and the dramatic, for many reasons he there alleges, ranked above it." We may well ask why Dryden had not studied Sophocles or, at least, *Samson Agonistes*, before committing such an opinion to print.

There is nothing less like the Greek tragedies than the intricate and entangled plots, the irrational extravagances, the over-blown language of Dryden's dramas. The characters, too, are little more than talking abstractions, and the speeches are rather arguments in finely finished verse than the conversation of men and women. In short, these plays do not mimic life, nor elevate it, nor idealise it consistently. The conception of the heroic which inspired them is but brazen, and rings hollow when tried. Consequently the rhetoric falls often into bathos, the tragedies become little more than melodrama, and seem to us to sail very near to burlesque, while the comedies tend equally to run

down into vulgar and licentious farce. There is much wit in them, often good sentiment, but seldom that unity of feeling necessary to bind the whole into one well-knit piece. Even in Corneille there is much more than a tendency to rhetorical excess, and the style is always tuned in a too elevated key. But the general movement of his plays is rarely undignified, it is heroic without absurdity, moving without constraint. But in Dryden there is often too much rant and bustle, whilst the speeches put into the mouth of some of the characters frequently degenerate into pure bombast. As we read them to-day, such plays verge towards the ridiculous, they make no approach—nor do they pretend to do so—to the truth of nature and of reason, not even to probability, yet it would appear that the audiences to whom they were presented were, on the whole, pleased with them, so great was the change in the tone of the theatre-going who, sixty years previously, had delighted in the enduring creations of Shakespeare or of Marlowe. He thought that what he heard was grand and heroic, he could not perceive that it was the ass's bray that bawled so loudly from the lion's skin.

If indeed the plays of the great English masters were presented at all, it was necessary that they should be paraphrased or recast, and so brought to the level of the intelligence or taste of the age. In *All for Love* (1678) Dryden presents us with one of the most successful adaptations from Shakespeare, the story being that of *Antony and Cleopatra*. He tells us that it was the only play he wrote entirely to please himself, the subject was congenial to him, and the achievement is one of his best in dramatic authorship. But it has only to be compared with its great original for the inferiority of the "heroic" mould to be discovered. Yet Dryden has handled his subject and applied the method with nothing short of genius. There is much fire and passion in

his lines, the sentiment is elevated, whilst some of the characters are finely conceived. Cleopatra, indeed, is not the heroine Shakespeare made of her, wonderfully fascinating and yet a woman throughout, Dryden's heroine is a less exalted figure, yet she is intensely passionate and sensuous. Ventidius is finely drawn, too, though he is thrown into greater prominence than is good for the supereminence which should always have been preserved for Antony and Cleopatra, the hero and heroine of the play. If in this play we find Dryden at his best in adapting Shakespeare to his own age, in *Troilus and Cressida* (1679) and *The Tempest*, he is almost at his worst. It is pathetic to read these recasts and to remember that the miserable resurrection-pie was intended to be—was thought by Dryden to be—an improvement upon the original banquet. Compare *All for Love* with *Antony and Cleopatra*, and we can realise how false was Dryden's ideal of the English drama. And this is quite clear, notwithstanding the fact that Dryden did not hamper *All for Love* with rime. Here we may make mention of the *State of Innocence* (1674), which Dryden described as an opera, and in which he tried to tell the story developed in Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The piece was never acted, nor does it add greatly to the poet's reputation, but it gave him the occasion to express his admiration for Milton, which was deep and sincere. In his preface to the play he describes Milton's poem as "undoubtedly one of the greatest, most noble, and sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced." This opinion was not yet a general one, and Dryden deserves great credit for his critical insight.

Two years after the appearance of the *Conquest of Granada* Dryden produced his best comedy—*Marriage à la Mode*. The idea of the plot is highly comic—that of a married pair, Rodophil and Doralice, who imagine themselves tired of each other. It proves

that they need only the excitement of a little jealousy to put matters right, and provision is made for this in the introduction of Palamede, a friend of Rodophil, and Melantha, to whom Palamede is to be married. Rodophil makes love to Melantha, whilst Palamede, who is greatly disturbed by the thought of his fast-approaching marriage, seeks relief in making love to Doralice. Much comedy but no harm results from the cross-purposes of these four. The wit is sparkling, and in places the poetry has exceptional charm. But unfortunately the comedy is written according to the taste of the times, and it is unpleasant to read as a whole.

The last of Dryden's rimed heroic tragedies was *Aurungzebe* (1675), and it achieved an unusual and well-merited success, though the plot lacks somewhat of coherence. The poetry presents passages of great beauty and power. The following, though often quoted, will bear repeating —

When I consider life, 'tis all a cheat,
 Yet, fooled with hope, men favour the deceit,
 Trust on, and think to-morrow will repay
 To-morrow's falser than the former day,
 Lies worse, and, while it says, we shall be blest
 With some new joys, cuts off what we possess
 Strange cozenage! None would live past years again,
 Yet all hope of pleasure in what yet remain,
 And, from the dregs of life, think to receive,
 What the first sprightly running could not give.
 I'm tired of waiting for this chemic gold,
 Which fools us young, and beggars us when old

In his prologue to this play, Dryden states that, "to confess a truth, though out of time," he

Grows weary of his long-loved mistress Rhyme,
 Passions too fierce to be in fetters bound,
 And nature flies him like enchanted ground;
 What verse can do, he has performed in this,
 Which he presumes the most correct of his,
 But spite of all his pride, a secret shame
 Invades his breast at Shakespeare's sacred name.

He evidently contemplated a change in his dramatic modes. In fact, he was contemplating the abandonment of the drama that he might compose an epic poem. But Dryden wrote to live, and means of living not being otherwise forthcoming, he had perforce to return to the stage. In *All for Love*, which next appeared (1678), we find that he has abandoned the heroic rimed verse, and that he now employs blank verse as his dramatic medium. One other play belonging to this period of Dryden's life remains to be mentioned. *The Spanish Friar* was probably written before the end of 1680. It was acted early in 1681. Two years previously (1678) great excitement had been set up by the discovery of a Popish plot, an excitement which continued to prevail in the political life of the nation for a long time afterwards. The people feared the prospect of James, Duke of York, a papist, succeeding Charles. In 1680 Shaftesbury and others brought an indictment against the Duke of York, but it was dismissed. *The Spanish Friar* was suggested by the prevailing political conditions, and, as an attack upon the Roman Catholic priesthood, was very popular. As a comedy, it is very effective, as a tragi-comedy, it is highly ingenious, but in its total effect the success of the play is rather that of the playwright than the poet.

Dryden's second period has no importance in our study of his dramatic productions, but one or two works in this connection remain for consideration, and may best be dealt with here, though chronologically they belong to the later period of his life. In 1690 Dryden resumed play-writing from sheer necessity, and in that year *Don Sebastian*, considered by many to be his best tragedy, appeared. But the play does not bear a critical and close examination of its plot, the tragic connection is not convincing or satisfying, and the play is only redeemed by the easy art with which Dryden the poet often succeeds

where Dryden the dramatist fails. A comedy, *Amphitryon*, followed, and in this the dramatist achieved a greater success. In it Dryden makes use of a plot which had already engaged the attention of Plautus in classic literature and of Molière in his own age, and nowhere has he more successfully employed his skill as an adapter of the ideas and labours of his predecessors. *King Arthur*, a dramatic opera, followed (1691) with music written by Purcell. It is a revision of what Dryden had originally prepared near the end of the reign of Charles, in honour of that monarch, but which the king did not live to see performed. It was now carefully revised so as "not to offend the present times nor a government which has hitherto protected me." It was performed with great success. Hereafter the poet lost his hold upon the theatre. *Cleomenes*, though it contains some fine poetry and at least one notable lyric, failed really to please. Last comes *Love Triumphant* (1694), a tragic-comedy which proved a complete failure. Dryden tried his dramatic skill no more.

4 Dryden's Middle Period (1681-88) — In November 1681, when the political atmosphere was highly charged with excitement, Dryden issued his remarkable poem, *Absalom and Achitophel*. It appeared when the Earl of Shaftesbury was awaiting in the Tower his trial on the charge of high treason, for having promoted a plot to secure the succession to Charles's illegitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth. The poem was a violent attack on Shaftesbury, and, by its timely publication, Dryden hoped to strengthen the popular feeling against that statesman and to make his conviction more secure. It was certainly written to please the king, and succeeded, but it did not secure the verdict the king desired. The poet introduces Shaftesbury as Achitophel, the treacherous counsellor of David, Absalom, David's misguided yet beloved son, stands for Mon-

mouth Upon the delineation of Achitophel the poet expends all his powers of attack Among the conspirators were some who,

By then monaich's fatal mercy grown
From pardoned rebels kinsmen to the throne
Were raised in power and public office high ,
Strong bands, if bands ungrateful men could tie
Of these the false Achitophel was first,
A name to all succeeding ages curst
For close designs and crooked counsels fit,
Sagacious, bold, and turbulent of wit ,
Restless, unfixed in principles and place,
In power unpleased, impatient of disgrace ,

In friendship false, implacable in hate,
Resolved to ruin or to rule the state

Monmouth, whom Charles really loved, was not so easy a subject of treatment in the guise of Absalom, but the poet skilfully extricated himself from his difficulty, though not without some sacrifice to the completeness of his artistic treatment, " 'tis juster to lament him than accuse " Buckingham received somewhat severe handling in the guise of Zimri

A man so various that he seemed to be
Not one, but all mankind's epitome
Stiff in opinions, always in the wrong,
Was everything by starts and nothing long ;
But in the course of one revolving moon
Was chymist, fiddler, statesman, and buffoon

The poem was received with tumultuous applause by the friends of the court, but great as was its success as a contribution to the political controversy of the hour, its real merit lies in its remarkable qualities as a political satire Nothing to compare with it had hitherto appeared in the English language, and nothing has since appeared to diminish its fame As a piece of versification its execution is perfect In his descriptions or portraits of his characters Dryden

achieved in verse what the character-writers of the earlier part of the century had made so fashionable an exercise in prose. His poem is a succession of such "characters" lightly strung together, each a perfect piece of work. The verse displays that wonderful command over the heroic couplet which Dryden exhibited in his earliest poems, but the ease and finish are the product of the long years of practice he had since had in his dramatic composition. The satire is keen and incisive as a blade of the most finely tempered steel. And the flow of the narrative is easy and unimpeded, the piece runs smoothly, and carries the reader with unsuspected rapidity from couplet to couplet. So smoothly do the verses run, that the didactic skill of the poet is hardly observed, yet, inquired into, nothing is more noteworthy in this and in the other poems of the same period than Dryden's power to conduct an argument or hold discussion in verse. In this respect he is far more natural than his successor in the art—Pope. The extent of his influence on the literature of the next century and a half cannot be better illustrated than by a comparison of these poems with those, for example, of William Cowper, the latest in the long succession of his imitators, and almost the best. The following is an example taken from the poem at random —

What cannot praise effect in mighty minds,
 When flattery soothes and when ambition blinds?
 Desire of power, on earth a vicious weed,
 Yet sprung from high is of celestial seed
 In God 'tis glory, and when men aspire,
 'Tis but a spark too much of heavenly fire
 The ambitious youth, too covetous of fame,
 Too full of angel's metal in his frame,
 Unwarily was led from virtue's ways,
 Made drunk with honour and debauched with praise.
 Half-loth and half-consenting to the ill,
 For loyal blood within him struggled still,
 He thus replied "And what pretence have I
 To take up arms for public liberty?"

My father governs with unquestioned right,
 The Faith's defender and mankind's delight,
 Good, gracious, just, observant of the laws,
 And heaven by wonders has espoused his cause
 Whom has he wronged in all his peaceful reign?
 Who sues for justice to his throne in vain?
 What millions has he pardoned, all his foes
 Whom just revenge did to his wrath expose?"

The failure of the Shaftesbury trial was celebrated by the striking of a medal. This is the explanation of the title of the poem which Dryden next published. *The Medal* appeared in March 1682. It is much shorter than *Absalom and Achitophel*, and contains a further attack upon Shaftesbury, of no less vehemence than before, and also an argument against republican government. It is graver in tone than its predecessor, but its satire has the same sharpness of tooth. A second part of *Absalom and Achitophel*, chiefly the work of Nahum Tate, speedily followed the publication of *The Medal*, to this Dryden contributed about two hundred lines, besides probably touching up the remainder.

Such publications as these could not fail to call forth counter attacks, and a fierce onslaught was made upon Dryden. The greatest importance perhaps belongs to *The Medal of John Bayes*, written by Thomas Shadwell, a piece of most scurrilous and violent personal abuse which so angered Dryden that he devoted his next satire to its author. It appeared in October 1682, and was entitled *MacFlecknoe*, after the name of an Irish priest and bad poet, who had been satirised as the absolute ruler of the realms of Nonsense. To the throne which he left vacant Dryden inducts Shadwell, because he, among all the rest, "never deviates into sense." The attack was made with vigour, and with masterly skill Dryden exposes to withering scorn his victim, "confirmed in full stupidity."

Dryden wrote no more directly satirical verse, but almost simultaneously with *MacFlecknoe* another poem

appeared, presenting the poet in a new guise as a defender of the faith of the Church of England. This poem was entitled *Religio Laici*. In it Dryden gives us his masterpiece as a writer of argument in verse. The appearance of this poem is a curious illustration of the fondness for theological discussion which is one of the characteristics of the seventeenth century. The men of Dryden's day, to whom the literature of the period was addressed, were chiefly seekers after pleasure, and the morals of the men of fashion were not of a peculiarly high standard, but this generation maintained the tradition of the early Stuarts and the Commonwealth in respect of religious controversy, though the precise questions debated might differ. The comparative freedom given to all parties in religion by Charles the Second's parliaments gave countenance to the uncommon fondness of many of the court for the Roman Catholic faith. This fondness did not exactly please the people, and their displeasure turned to positive fear as the prospect of the accession of James the Second came nearer, and his adherence to the Roman Catholic faith became more pronounced. Dryden might therefore well believe that the *Religio Laici* was certain of a good reception from the public to whom it was addressed, its subject was nicely adapted to the times. The poem opens finely, the thought is not inferior to the beauty of the lines in which it is expressed —

Dim as the borrowed beams of moon and stars
To lonely, weary, wandering travellers
Is reason to the soul, and as on high
Those rolling fires discover but the sky,
Not light us here, so reason's glimmering ray
Was lent, not to assure our doubtful way,
But guide us upward to a better day
And as those nightly tapers disappear
When day's bright Lord ascends our hemisphere,
So pale grows reason at religion's sight,
So dies, and so dissolves in supernatural light.

The poem then settles down steadily to its argumentative purpose, and, with much grace and apparently the greatest ease, the poet develops his position. Ancient philosopher and modern deist, reliant upon purely ethical theories of conduct, disclaim the necessity of revelation, but Dryden, with fine eloquence, displays the position of the Church of England as providing for Englishmen the true basis of moral and national duty.

Five years later, the poet who thus argued on behalf of the English Church had become a Roman Catholic, and now, of course, desired to justify his changed religious attitude by further argument in verse, which he gives us in *The Hind and the Panther* (1687). We shall hardly be guilty of unfairness to the poet in assuming that his change of faith was prompted at least as much by a desire to gain and to keep the favour of James the Second, as by a real conviction of the primacy of the claim made by the Roman Catholic Church upon his faith. John Evelyn has an interesting entry in his diary, under date 19th January 1686, which runs as follows —“Dryden, the famous playwright, and his two sons, and Mrs Nelly (Miss to the late king) were said to go to Mass, such proselytes were no great loss to the Church.” The poet’s own description of the poem, which consists of three parts, cannot be improved upon. “The first part, consisting most in religions, characters, and variation, I have endeavoured to raise, and give it the majestic term of ‘heroic’ poesy. The second being matter of dispute, and chiefly concerning Church authority, I was obliged to make as plain and perspicuous as possibly I could, yet not wholly neglecting the numbers, though I had not frequent occasions for the magnificence of verse. The third, which has more of the nature of domestic conversation, is, or ought to be, more familiar than the two former. There are in it two episodes or fables, which

are interwoven with the main design, so that they are properly parts of it, though they are also distinct stories in themselves. In both of these I have made use of the commonplaces of satire, whether true or false, which are urged by the members of the one Church against the other, at which I hope no reader of either party will be scandalised, because they are not of my invention, but as old, to my knowledge, as the times of Boccaccio and Chaucer on the one side, and as those of the Reformation on the other."

The true Church, *i.e.* the Roman Catholic, is compared to the milk-white hind. The Church that is false is compared with the spotted panther. Dryden cannot be considered happy in thus constructing the framework or skeleton of his poem, the setting of the piece is perilously near the verge of the ridiculous. It is curious that so great a master of satire should not have felt the danger that a poem in which beasts discuss the sacraments of religion, might be misjudged as the outflow of his satiric vein. Apart from this criticism, the poem is filled with delightful music, and the richness of the description in many of its passages is not exceeded in any other of Dryden's works.

In the interval between the publication of these religious poems, Dryden published two Pindaric odes after the fashion set by Cowley. One was occasioned by the death and funeral of Charles the Second—the *Threnodia Augustalis* (1685). As Dryden was Poet Laureate, we may regard the poem as a piece of official work. The second, the *Ode to the Memory of Mrs Ann Killigrew*, contains work of a far higher order. It is an ode with which there are in our language few fit to compare. In this ode, and in that called *Alexander's Feast* (1697), there is more of the true lyrical spirit than in any other of Dryden's poems. In this the poet *sings*. One other poem of this period remains for mention—the unfortunate *Britannia Rediviva* (1688)—again a piece of official

work on the occasion of the birth of a son to James the Second. The Revolution quickly came to falsify the poet's hopes and to scatter his visions.

5 Dryden's Last Period (1688-1700)—With the coming of William the Third, Dryden's public posts were lost. As a Roman Catholic, he was too deeply committed to the faith for a reversion to Protestantism to be undertaken, though it must be said to the poet's credit that he does not seem ever to have contemplated such a step. He remained true to the faith, and died therein. He could not therefore take the oaths to the new government, and was deprived of his pensions and position. Dryden's first recourse for means of earning a living was again to the drama, and in the next six years he produced *Don Sebastian*, *Amphitryon*, *Cleomenes*, and *Love Triumphant*. These have been sufficiently discussed in dealing with our poet's work as a dramatist.

The ill successes which, on the whole, followed these efforts, made it necessary that some other form of work should be attempted. Dryden therefore concentrated his labours on translation, and again he hit off the public taste with unerring instinct. Less inclined, or less able, to read the ancient classics in the originals, the public desired some acquaintance with these writings, and professed real interest in them. To know them, a translator was required. Dryden was at hand to supply the want. In 1693 he began his most considerable work of this kind, the translation of *Virgil*, which was finished in 1696 and published in 1697. Its success was immediate, and the profits considerable. Previously, in 1693, he issued his translations of *Juvenal* and *Persius*, whilst other works of translation, which appeared at various times—some as early as 1680, as well as in miscellanies published in 1684 and 1685—consisted of parts of *Homer* and *Theocritus*, *Ovid* and *Horace*. His fame as a translator will always chiefly depend upon his

Virgil In it he gave his public exactly what they wanted, and was rewarded accordingly with their praise, and, what he needed more, the profits from his sales. He did not give his readers either in his *Virgil* or elsewhere, anything that corresponded with the spirit or the form of his originals, they did not ask for this. But he gave them the substance of the ancient stories, and he gave it them in his own verse, vigorous and—to their ears—musical. As a translator, therefore, Dryden did not strive for literal^a truth to the text of his originals, nor did he attempt to imitate them in their verse forms. He did not hesitate to allow himself a freedom which was sometimes considerable, and if we would have the true flavour of his originals, we must go elsewhere. Still, his *Virgil* is, like Pope's *Homer*, readable as an original poem, it is a vigorously told tale in verse. Perhaps his best success in reproducing the real spirit of his originals is found in one or two of his Horatian pieces. Take, for example, the following —

Happy the man, and happy he alone,
 He who can call to day his own
 He who, secure within, can say,
 To-morrow do thy worst, for I have lived to-day,
 Be fair, or foul, or rain, or shine,
 The joys I have possessed, in spite of fate, are mine,
 Not Heaven itself upon the past has power,
 But what has been, has been, and I have had my hour

In his translations from Theocritus, whose Greek has a peculiar sweetness and idyllic charm, Dryden is perhaps farthest of all from his original. On the other hand, in his *Juvenal*, and in parts of his *Persius*, he comes near to the spirit of his models, their satiric touch having some kinship with his own.

Having presented to his readers versions of the ancient classics, it occurred to Dryden that it would be no less advantageous to the modern reader to

perform the same office for him in respect of "our old English poet, Chaucer" So I soon resolved to put their merits to the trial, by turning some of the *Canterbury Tales* into our language" These, with other stories from the Italian of Boccaccio, at length appeared in March 1700, under the title of "Fables" From Chaucer he took the story of *Palamon and Arcite, or the Knight's Tale*, the *Cock and the Fox*, or the *Tale of the Nun's Priest*, the *Flower and the Leaf* (in which he departed further from his original than in any of the others), the *Wife of Bath's Tale*, and the *Character of a Good Parson* (imitated from Chaucer and enlarged), from Boccaccio he took the stories of *Sigismonde and Guiscardo*, *Theodore and Honoria*, and *Cymon and Iphigenia* Of all Dryden's writings these have ever been the most popular, nothing that he wrote gave, or still gives, greater delight to his readers They were the works of the poet's last years, and appeared only a month before he died Yet the strength of the master's hand was undiminished, the flow of his verse never more liquidly smooth, the graceful fancy of his wit never more attractive There is something pathetic and at the same time peculiarly attractive, in the opening of *Cymon and Iphigenia*.

Old as I am, for ladies' love unfit,
The power of beauty I remember yet,
Which once inflamed my soul, and still inspires my wit

The story, as it is told in the *Decameron*, is not particularly powerful or attractive, but, in its English dress, Dryden has succeeded in investing it with great attractiveness, and has given to the characters a personality, and to the circumstances a verisimilitude, which make the "fable," as a piece of story-telling, superior to its original. Of the other fables similar praise might be spoken The student of literature, who would know something of the real

charm that still resides in "heroic" verse when wielded by a master-hand, must turn to those passages in the works of John Dryden

6 Dryden's Prose—Something yet remains to be said in further proof of the versatility of the genius of this great writer of English. Not the least valuable contributions he has made to the literary wealth of the English people are his prose writings, alike for their form and for the matter in them. It became Dryden's custom to preface his poetical works with essays or prose introductions which, taken together, have considerable bulk, and yet more considerable value for their style. It is not too much to say that Dryden did more than any other writer to provide with models those who were immediately to succeed him as writers in prose. He made enormous strides towards simplicity and clearness. In him, English prose escapes from the involved sentences of weary length and oftentimes imperfect syntax, which mar the work of even the greatest of his predecessors. Clarendon, Jeremy Taylor, Milton—even quaint Sir Thomas Browne—powerful prose-writers though they were, demand of their readers a closeness of attention unnecessary could they have written with the directness and simplicity of Dryden. It is but a short step from such writings as the *Essay on Satire* or the *Dialogue on Dramatic Poesy* to the memorable papers of Addison or Steele in *The Spectator*, and of their successors in *The Rambler* or the *Edinburgh Review*. The writers display the same readiness to take common ground with their everyday reader, they appeal to his common-sense with their strong common-sense, their arguments may not dwell upon common themes, but the same penetrating vision is applied to the end, and the same clear-sighted progress is made toward the goal, the language, too, is the same—with no Latinisms, no far-fetched conceits, no circumlocutions.

tory phrases Yet there is no loss of dignity in all this—dignity no less personal than kindred to the subject in hand The essays and criticisms of Dryden are still to be read with interest and benefit, his appreciations are, on the whole, just and discriminating, his criticisms generally based upon the soundest literary canons, and not wanting in perspicuity of expression Passing through his hands, English prose became an instrument of expression, flexible to the mood of the writer and reflective of his spirit, but more, it received those qualities of natural simplicity and grace of movement which, after the manner of Dryden's yet greater successors in the art, have characterised all the noblest of the prose-writers since his day Our next concern is to discuss the application of this useful weapon, a clear and workmanlike English prose, to all manner of subjects, grave and gay The prose-writers of the eighteenth century will not perplex us with their ill-trained periods and involved constructions, whether it be theology or philosophy, journalism or polemic essay, we shall at least be able to understand what the writers are trying to say Dryden did much to bring about this desirable state of things

7 The Dawn of the Eighteenth Century — Dryden's death saw the close of the seventeenth century and the opening of a new order of things in politics, in social life, and in literature The seventeenth is a disorderly century, enveloped in the dust of stern and necessary conflict Great ideals rose and were overwhelmed, low ideals thrived awhile, but soon lay prostrate too Eventually the moderate man—the Whig, with his spirit of toleration—became supreme Does not our literature reflect exactly this state of things? The great men—Milton, Browne, Herrick, Taylor, Bunyan, Locke—what a babel of voices is theirs! Dryden, man of genius though he was, was only moderately great in several depart-

ments His success and his influence, though he was a strong Tory, were like the success and influence of the Whig ministers of William the Third The average man, without strong passions or exacting principles, was dominant Clear and precise thinking marks all the work of Dryden, as it marks the policy of William, Somers, and Halifax We begin, with Dryden's death, the reign of common-sense Excess and enthusiasm disappear from the English temperament and from English literature The fruit of Dryden's life was this men who wrote took care to write well Moreover, Dryden was a professional literary man, who lived by his writings, he did much to make authorship a profession and an honourable calling, and thus he prepared the way for the eighteenth century writers, whom we are next to study

CHAPTER VIII

Journalism—Defoe

The demand for the Journalist Defoe (1667-1731) His relation to William the Third *The Shortest Way with the Dissenters* The *Review* *Robinson Crusoe* and other tales Defoe's character and genius

Daniel Defoe (1661-1731)

1698	<i>Essay on Projects</i>	1719	<i>Robinson Crusoe</i>
1701	<i>The True-born Englishman</i>	1720	<i>Captain Singleton</i>
1702	<i>The Shortest Way with the Dissenters</i>		<i>Memoirs of a Cavalier</i>
1703	Great Storm in England	1722	<i>Journal of the Plague Year</i>
1704-13	The <i>Review</i>	1724	<i>Roxana</i>
		1724-26	<i>Gentleman's Tour</i>

1 **The demand for the Journalist**—The reign of William the Third brought back to English politics a serious tone, the sense of responsibility spread as the influence of the Parliament grew, and a wide circle of Englishmen began to be interested in national problems. Public opinion was sought by ministers, public approval of his conduct was necessary to the king. And this was the more necessary from the coldness and unimaginativeness of William's character. His wisdom and foresight were not showy virtues, and neither appealed to the thoughtless mind of the country squire, who was infected with a sentimental loyalty to the Stuart cause, nor to the practical mind of the London merchant, who had no eye for state policy and little feeling for political

progress Nevertheless, these and other interests had to be conciliated, even to be consulted, by William and his ministers, and although few kings have been less literary than William the Third, his reign found an almost untilled field for the labour of the writer, under a parliamentary government, with the two parties already sharply defined, the pen is indeed mightier than the sword, the journalist becomes the statesman's inevitable companion and support

2 Daniel Defoe (1661-1731) —Poems like Dryden's *Absalom and Achitophiel* were of course in one sense journalism, in so far, that is, as they were commentaries upon current events, and Milton among others has shown us how the talent of a literary man could be applied to the purposes of controversy, but from the time of William the Third the running criticism of governmental acts, whether it takes the form of occasional pamphlet or of leading article in a daily newspaper, has been almost unbrokenly with us With the beginning, then, of our party system, began at the same time journalism, writers on both sides scribbled page after page in support of those who hired them, and occasionally an article or a pamphlet out of the vast heap of ephemeral rubbish rises into the serene atmosphere of literature and claims immortality in spite of its surroundings

It is this which gives Daniel Defoe the right to a prominent place in English literature. Journalist of genius is the favourite description of this remarkable man, and if journalism means the power to deal with the things of the moment in a popular way, to diagnose the general need and to have an unequalled gift of satisfying it, then Defoe deserves the description For no man with a subtler knowledge of the popular pulse ever wrote, whether he scribbled his marvellously lucid political pamphlets or ran together his realistic yarns ✓ Defoe knew exactly how to please the majority of his readers. He wrote *for*

them, not *to* them. Popularity was his mania, and he used his downright, blustering, prosaic genius mainly to the satisfaction of this lust.

Born in 1661, the son of a butcher and a Nonconformist, Defoe had an adventurous life, the early portion of which reads like a chapter from one of his own romances. He was educated for the Nonconformist ministry—well educated, it would appear, seeing that he boasts of his attainments in five languages, in astronomy, geography, history, and other useful sciences. But there is nothing in Defoe's many volumes so little to be relied upon as his references to himself. He had from the first a perfect genius for mystification, he loved to deceive his readers and his friends, and the more elaborate and complete the deception, the more he was pleased. Yet, if we can make no conclusion about details, the general spirit of his life is seen in *Robinson Crusoe* or *Captain Singleton*, his knowledge is there seen to be chiefly of the practical sort, and certainly did not extend to culture or philosophy.

Defoe did not become a minister of religion; the prospects were not good enough. But he seems to have been a zealous Nonconformist, he was at all events zealous enough to join the Monmouth rebellion in 1685. Escaping somehow from the subsequent persecution, he set up in business as a hose merchant in the city, but this was a failure, and Defoe was compelled to flee from his creditors—a bankrupt—in 1692. Whether his failure was due to misfortune or to cunning, cannot be determined, but Defoe was not drowned, and very shortly he was at the surface again, striking out indomitably for wealth and fame. We soon find him involved in new projects, in a few years he was successful enough in a brick manufactory at Tilbury to be able to clear off the larger part of his debts.

These were the years which introduced him seriously to the profession of literature, and his pen became one of the chief supports of the plans of William the Third. He had made a temporary fame in 1691, by means of a satire in rough verse exposing the disloyalty of a Jacobite conspiracy, but he was no poet, and the inevitable comparison with Dryden's brilliant lines soon killed Defoe's clumsy work. But in 1694 he obtained his proper place by two pamphlets which supported the policy of William in loyal and vigorous language. The result was an appointment in the revenue department, in gratitude for which Defoe threw his marvelous literary energy into the service of the king. Before the end of William's reign, he had written strong and trenchant pamphlets on such public topics as the question of a standing army, occasional conformity, and the war with France—all of them matters of vital and immediate importance. The clear incisive English of these pamphlets, their dashing assaults on the practical principles of each case, the abounding energy and fertility of mind which they show, make them remarkable among compositions usually ephemeral and worthless.

Defoe also embodied, in the *Essay on Projects* (1698), a number of propositions which represented the advanced radicalism of his time. His journalistic work took also the form of verse. In 1701 he supported the unpopular king in some vigorous doggerel called *The True-born Englishman*, which was so influential, and, in a rough way, witty, that Defoe was henceforth regarded as one of the foremost of the literary men of his time.

3 Defoe and Nonconformity. — Defoe served William honestly and honourably, profiting from the service, but forsaking no principles. The accession of Queen Anne, however, did not make this course so easy. The High Church influence made

it necessary for the Nonconformist to be wary in his walking, especially as strong objection began to be taken to the practice of occasional conformity. This drew from Defoe one of his most remarkable and most brilliant of his pamphlets.

The Shortest Way with the Dissenters, as this pamphlet is entitled, is only surpassed as a piece of irony by the writings of Swift, who was just rising into fame. It puts into plain and inimitable language the opinions of the extreme High Churchman regarding the Dissenters, taken to their limit. It attacks the whole idea of toleration, asserting that the whole history of dissent during Stuart times proves the futility of attempting to reconcile men whose principles are grounded in disloyalty and rebellion. James the First had been fatally lenient to them, they had put to death "that excellent prince, King Charles the First," and set up a "sordid impostor" in his place, and how they requited the unfortunate James the Second for "his gentleness and love" towards them, every living man knew. Under William they had wheedled themselves into all positions of profit and distinction. Was that to continue? Would the Church curse them with its charity still further? There was one remedy—and only one.

If one severe law were made and punctually executed, that whoever was found at a conventicle should be banished the nation, and the preacher be hanged, we should soon see an end of the tale—they would all come to Church, and one age would make us all one again.

A heroic remedy, in truth! But, reading the thing now, we may well wonder how the most bigoted Churchman or the dullest Dissenter could have been deceived by it. True, the authorship was not at first avowed, equally true that the caricature was amazingly realistic. But the boisterous

discussion is so clearly to us a burst of vulgar but hearty laughter, the vitality is so strong, so rollicking, like that of a boy indulging his cleverness, that it is difficult to submit to any illusion. It is, perhaps, the real irony and terrible humour which we shall soon see in Swift, that makes Defoe's effort seem almost puerile to us. It is certain that we can only see in it the lucid eloquence of the writer who had his way to steer amid the doubtful shoals of politics.

The consequences of his sporting action soon came. The wrath of the High Church party was extreme, and Defoe was compelled to go into hiding, but, soon afterwards he surrendered himself to the Government. The result was that he was fined, condemned to be exposed three times in the pillory, and sent to Newgate during the queen's pleasure. This harsh and vindictive punishment he bore lightly, it made him famous, he could pose as a martyr in the cause of dissent and of free criticism.

Earless on high stood unabashed Defoe,

wrote Pope. Not earless, but unabashed, Defoe faced the mob who saluted him as a hero, he had defied the authorities, and people came to see him standing in the pillory, out of an almost reverent curiosity. It might almost be said that he enjoyed himself thoroughly on those three days.

As in the pillory, so in Newgate. He was distressed by his separation from his wife and family, but he did not permit his distress on this head to overcome him or to clip the wings of his energies. He mixed as on equal terms with the strange medley of criminals who were his companions in misfortune, he learnt their histories, and observed their characters faithfully and with a strange gruesome interest. His later stories, such as *Moll Flanders*, show that his knowledge of criminal and vicious characters was

profound and minute, much of this knowledge he might well have obtained during his stay at Newgate. The squalid and the filthy seemed to fascinate him. The man or woman fighting defiantly against the enormous odds of circumstance, was his hero. It is probable that it was this which gave him his fellow-feeling with the wrecks of humanity at Newgate. Himself a man of coarse mould, without high moral ideals, he had flung himself into the select circles of the politicians. His power compelled them to accept him, but they accepted him only as a *parvenu*, and the men of letters, like the statesmen, treated him only with supercilious disdain.

4 Defoe's *Review* — With unconquered vitality, with a feeling of half-triumph in his imprisonment, Defoe fell again to writing. A great storm which took place in 1703 led him to impose upon the public a vivid and realistic account of it, written as by an eyewitness. For the accuracy of his statements he solemnly gives his word, but he could have learnt nothing except by hearsay, and the narrative gives another proof of his power to invent circumstantial fictions, which were so inherently likely as to deceive the most critical. The year 1721 saw a similar effort in his circumstantial *Journal of the Plague Year*.

A more important work was also commenced in the prison. This was his famous *Review of the Affairs of France*, which was begun in 1704, and was carried on continuously for nine years. It was a sheet containing four quarto pages, printed in small type, and published twice a week. When it is remembered that Defoe wrote the whole of it unaided, the mere mass of really excellent writing makes us wonder at the man's tremendous energy and fertility of mind. We must not forget, either, that the conception of the work was almost as new as the matter. News-sheets, such as *The London Post* and *The Daily Courant*, existed, but they only

gave information—bare news without comment. And a scandal-paper, called the *Observer*, under the control of one John Tutchin, discussed matters of general and social interest. The method of Defoe was different. He was not averse to scandal, and he did not despise news. But his pen was fluent and his brain active and independent, he conceived the idea of adding to the newspaper the equivalent of the leading articles in modern newspapers. The serious part of the *Review* may be considered as a series of leading articles on contemporary events, especially those in France.

They were written by a man who affected to be free of all political prepossessions, and to be desirous only of enlightening his countrymen, and of giving them the real truth about important state matters. But there is little doubt now that Defoe was released from prison upon some unwritten condition that he would support Harley, and certainly the tone of the *Review* changed as the Government changed, Defoe acting throughout without principle and without scruple. In short, he became a mere hireling, and each Government in turn was able and thought it desirable to secure his services.

When this allowance has been made, however, and when a further allowance has been made for the rapidity of its production, it is still true that much useful metal is hidden amid the dross of the *Review*. The political spy was not without insight, and not without enthusiasm for practical schemes of reform. He was a supporter of toleration and of free government. His sympathies were democratic, he was an advocate of enlightened proposals for improving the lot of the poor and the unfortunate. He foresaw old-age pensions. He supported the war with France as a war against despotism and on behalf of freedom. His interests ranged from Louis XIV to Jack Sheppard, from the London taverns to the miseries

of the Protestants in Hungary. However seriously he misused his vast talents, these facts must stand, alongside his vigorous command of racy English, to his credit.

Defoe's life becomes more and more mysterious as we approach its end. We cannot follow him in his tortuous conduct. We lose ourselves in a labyrinth of double-dealing. But pamphlet after pamphlet rushes forth from his pen, some merely scurrilous (for Defoe was not popular among his fellow-writers, and had many enemies to deal with), others simple mystifications, others pure fictions under the mask of truth, still others based upon elaborate paradoxes, but few without an interesting page, wise at least in the worldly sense. Defoe was the king of Grub Street, the hero among hack-writers. He sold his services to a party, but he did not lose his patriotism. He did not shrink from intrigue, from lying, from dangerous espionage, but it was often on behalf of objects good in themselves, such as the union of the English and Scotch parliaments, and in such cases it may be argued that the end partly justifies the means. But Defoe's career during the reigns of Queen Anne and George I. does not make attractive reading. Full of adventure, full of change, full of mystery, it was too much guided by motives of the most sordid self interest. In *Mist's Journal*, nominally a Tory review, Defoe engaged to push forward Whig principles in a Tory disguise, and thus deceived both parties into the belief that he was their supporter. He was the Jack Sheppard of literature, brilliant, clever, rejoicing in the deception and outwitting of the world, his enemy. Now and then the enemy prevailed. In prison or in flight, Defoe, like his robber-hero and friend, was sometimes forced to retire from the field.

5 Defoe's Fictions — It would be tedious to enumerate the newspapers and reviews with which

Defoe was concerned after the death of the *Review* in 1713. His labours did not cease: he was engaged in a hundred enterprises of equivocal and even dangerous character. By 1719 he had reached the summit of his worldly fortunes. He could live openly as a rich man, keeping his own carriage and servants in his own view his life had been a success. It was at this point that a lull in his political activities gave him an opportunity of writing the book which alone of his writings is generally known. *Robinson Crusoe* is Defoe's one work of art, his one immortal. It is the one among his very many writings which works out its idea completely and in the manner best suited to it.

Though it was Defoe's first acknowledged fiction, it was very far, as we have seen, from being his first attempt in the art of invention. The whole of his life, in fact, had been spent in making falsehood pass for truth. In plausible invention, in the skill to deceive, he was *facile princeps*, even in an age and amidst a world of intrigue and cunning, and it was, therefore, no new experience for him to set before the world an elaborate fiction with all the airs of truth upon it. He had, as was necessary to him, a substratum of fact to work upon. A sailor named Alexander Selkirk had spent four years upon the solitary island of Juan Fernandez. His story was well-known to every one, and Defoe, with the journalist's instinct, fed the popular whim with his circumstantial narrative. Selkirk and Crusoe were one in the popular imagination, if not in fact. The book was a commercial success, which the shrewd author tried to follow up with a second volume of Crusoe's adventures.

Within its limits, *Robinson Crusoe* is almost a perfect book. It is deficient in all graces of style and of thought, it is lacking in elevation of moral sentiment, in spirituality, in the loftier human emotions

But that is only to say that it was written by Defoe. No author was ever less a creature of the air and more a creature of the earth than he. The feeling for beauty was utterly absent from him. The subtle spiritual influences of nature were but a meaningless nonsense in his brain. We must not, therefore, expect to find anything of the sort in *Robinson Crusoe*. Crusoe is the practical-minded sailor, simple, matter-of-fact, unsentimental, a man of deeds, not a man of dreams. His religion, his mind, his fingers are essentially English and practical. His prayers, like the adaptations of his mind and the work of his hands, are for his immediate needs.

It is perhaps the lack of warmth that is implied in this deficiency that makes *Robinson Crusoe* fail to thrill, even while it fascinates its readers. That Robinson Crusoe *is* a man, skilful, ingenious, full of resource and courage, is a triumph for Defoe's inventive genius. Robinson does act as we should imagine Alexander Selkirk would have acted. How many schoolboys really discover for themselves that their favourite book is not a history? Robinson Crusoe is no less a reality than their model locomotive, the interest in him is similar to the interest in a piece of mechanism which *works* well. He accomplishes something, makes something out of strange and refractory material, is ready for the most unexpected and most varied emergencies. Above all, he wins. If he had ultimately failed and been overcome, Robinson would have ceased to be heroic, the practical man is judged only by one criterion: if he is not successful, he is doomed. And Defoe's skill in inventing difficulties and obstacles for Crusoe is only equalled by his skill in extricating him from every scrape and in bringing him through successfully at the end.

As a picture, then, of the practical man placed in

the position of a shipwrecked sailor on a lonely island, *Robinson Crusoe* is a thoroughly human book. Some writers, however, have seen in it what Defoe himself vaguely hinted at—an allegory of his own life. They would say, for example, that the man Friday really represents an assistant whom Defoe had carefully trained into his own style and thoughts, and who, therefore, accounts to some extent for Defoe's extraordinary productiveness. They would adapt other details of the story to incidents in Defoe's career. But it seems to be over-running the probabilities of the case. That Defoe saw in himself the parallel of a Robinson Crusoe, shipwrecked on the desert isle of London and forced to use all his arts to squeeze a livelihood out of conditions and circumstances that would soon have overwhelmed him, we need not doubt. The "Serious Reflections" of Robinson Crusoe, appended to the second volume, make this very likely. But more likely is it that Defoe has portrayed in Crusoe his ideal man. He is so obviously enthusiastic for his hero, he has entered so fully into the spirit of his life, and his pious reflections are so certainly Defoe's own, and were so admirably fitted to his own life, that this interpretation of *Robinson Crusoe* seems to us the right one. Defoe's admiration for the skilful practical man appears in almost everything he wrote, from the *Essay on Projects* in 1698 to the *Gentleman's Tour* in 1724. In Crusoe he receives his fullest and highest development. We need not suppose that Defoe had his eye on anything loftier than popular fame, but, in writing *Robinson Crusoe*, he was able to unite his journalistic impulses with what he had of higher and artistic faculties.

The same eagerness to use the whim of the moment to his own advantage directed the composition of his other tales. It is noteworthy that they all deal with criminals or rogues of some kind. The *Adventures*

of *Captain Singleton*, a pirate who crossed Africa, are cruder, but almost as cleverly invented as those of Robinson Crusoe. In *Moll Flanders* (1722), the fight of a woman against the worst aspects of London life is described with a vivid and loathsome realism. Later, Defoe wrote a biography of that king of thieves, Jack Sheppard, in one of his journals. Of course the tale was said to be written by Jack himself. But the hands are the hands of Esau. Defoe evidently knew Jack Sheppard well, and most certainly admired him.

As further examples of his adaptability, his *Gentleman's Tour* through Great Britain may be mentioned. This book was intended to act as a guide-book to the interesting features of England and Scotland, and Defoe had prepared himself to write it by many journeys through the countries he describes. His very clear and unadorned style was splendidly suited to this work, and the result is very satisfactory. The book is now valuable as a thoroughly reliable picture of the social life of the time. We see the difficulties of travel, the wild, half-savage life of the country districts, the bad roads and worse inns, which were to be rendered even more memorable in the novels of Fielding.

The end of Defoe was mysterious. No one can tell for what reason he left his home in 1729, and became a wanderer among the purlieus of London. The exposure of his intrigues had not cost him his pension. There is no evidence of any persecution by the arms of the law, political or criminal. But for two years he lived the life of a hunted fugitive, afraid of imaginary creditors. Twenty-five years of double-dealing, in an atmosphere of suspicion and uncertainty, had made shifty conduct a mania with him. He lived in constant fear of exposure and arrest, and in his old age, cut off from his family, worn out by labour, a martyr to disease, with his

powers failing, his fear seems to have become an insanity, and he fled from phantom enemies, living now here and now there, and dying in Moorfields in 1731

Thus pathetically ended the life of the virile genius who laid well and truly some of the foundation-stones in the edifice of English Literature. Though he is a solitary figure in our pages, denied the society of the Addisons, Swifts, and Popes, he is, perhaps more than they, representative of a type common from his day to ours. He was guilty of shameless falsehoods, of most dishonest political practices, his highest maxims were those of worldly cunning and of self-interest, his talents were easily bought by the best bidder, yet deep down in his nature one feels that there was something strong and truthful—a love of greater causes and nobler aims. Without sentiment and without romance, without passion and without a vital religion, he was nevertheless an advocate before the uneducated public of many a good and useful measure. He appealed to a wider audience than any writer had yet attempted to address, and if he had the spirit of the demagogue, it is equally true that he enlarged the circle of those who interested themselves in public affairs. By thus enlarging the scope of journalism, he did good service to many other writers who made a living with their pens. He descended, morally and intellectually, to the level of those for whom he wrote, and so does not attain the clear fame of an Addison or Swift. But he can claim above them the parentage of our modern novel, as well as a superiority in the arts of realistic invention which cannot be disputed. His genius was not of the highest kind. He does not help us much in the greater problems of life. His knowledge of human nature is not like Addison's or Swift's. Yet we cannot deny the existence of either the genius or the knowledge. Through him we see

how mean and paltry the life of the highest circles in England became after the death of William the Third Together with Addison, Swift, and Pope, Defoe makes the society and life of the reign of Anne live before us

A curious personality who may serve to link Defoe to Swift is **Bernard de Mandeville (1669-1733)**, whose *Fable of the Bees, or Private Vices Public Benefits*, led him into controversies which he seemed much to enjoy He was by origin a Dutchman, but he wrote English with a vulgar though effective clearness He was a deist, and the only one of that numerous swarm to survive as a literary personality He was, like Defoe, kept out of the charmed circle of the wits, but he was a clever charlatan, a keen critic of the conventional, an immoral and acute writer on medical themes.

CHAPTER IX

Swift

Swift's Early Life Patronage of Temple The *Tale of a Tub*
 The *Battle of the Books* Political Work The *Examiner*
 Pamphlets Ireland The *Drapier's Letters* *Gulliver's*
Travels Swift, Stella, and Vanessa Arbuthnot

Jonathan Swift (1667-1745)

1704	The <i>Tale of a Tub</i> , etc	1714	Swift became Dean of St
1711	The <i>Examiner</i>		Patrick's
1710-14	<i>Journal to Stella</i>	1722-24	<i>Drapier's Letters</i>
1714	Formation of the Scriblerus Club,	1726	<i>Gulliver's Travels</i>

1 Swift's Early Life — While Defoe was involving himself in politics, a greater genius than he was also commencing his turbulent literary career. There is something uncanny in the greatness and strength of Jonathan Swift which makes us feel that we are in the presence of a sort of monster intellect, fearful to the mind of ordinary men. His humour is as terrible, his indignation as overwhelming, as the attacks of some Grendel in the warm halls of men. If we face him and attempt to stem the avalanche of his sarcasm, we soon shrink back confused and routed, 'If we would sympathise with him, we are staggered by the superhuman fearlessness, disgusted and dismayed by his fierceness and brutality. Swift's terrible eye searches poor humanity and all its works

through and through, exposing ruthlessly and with savage joy its gangrenes and deformities. Nothing that is base or vile escapes him, no weakness of man but feels the lash of his irony. He is a pessimist without relief, a misanthrope who has no hope and very little love for mankind. And yet he fascinates us. He carries us off into his wild lairs, and we cannot escape from the evil spell which he casts over us. He holds our souls as the frowning precipices of earthquake-ridden mountains, or as the cruel play of lightning among the lordly trees. It is grand but terrible. And the strange thing is that, behind the display of devastating power, there is something beneficent, something true and good.

Swift's was the dominant mind during the first years of the eighteenth century, his hand was on every plough, his influence felt in every movement. He was the bitter and unceasing enemy of all humbug, all pretence, all self-complacency. Everyone feared him, none understood him. His fierce sincerity dismayed friend and foe alike. For a few short years only did the world smile on him. He had only himself to blame, the scornful superiority, the bitter condemnation of his enemies, the impatient desire to obtain preferment which his Tory friends would not give, the mysterious disease which tortured him through life—these did not make for happiness, did not help him to see the brightness of life. The polite arts of an Addison and the underhand shifts of Defoe were equally impossible to the tactless and contemptuous genius upon whom the world took a full revenge for the many insults he showered upon it.

born after the father's death
Swift was a posthumous child who, early in life, was kidnapped by his nurse, with the subsequent connivance of his mother, who had been left in great poverty by her husband. She was, however, well connected, and, after her son had received some

sort of education at Kilkenny and Dublin, she was able to procure for him an introduction to her relative, Sir William Temple. This should have been an excellent opening for a clever youth who had the necessary patience and tact, for Temple was one of the most influential men of his time, a man also who prided himself upon his culture as much as he rated his skill in diplomacy. But Swift had the rough manners which would naturally result from his irregular early life. He was without refinement or polish, though even now full of wit and book-knowledge. The literary virtuoso, the dabbler in life, the fastidious fine gentleman of French manners, was not the most congenial of patrons for the untamed Swift, but he seems to have perceived his great gifts, and, though Swift found his position irksome enough to leave it for a time and to take priest's orders, Temple was glad to welcome him back to his house at Moor Park on much more honourable terms. From 1696 to 1699, when Temple died, Swift lived quietly with his patron, and it was during these years that he took up seriously the duties of authorship.

2 *The Tale of a Tub* (1704).—Although it was not published till 1704, the *Tale of a Tub* was written during the calm days at Moor Park. This is only a short book, but it is one of Swift's greatest writings, and it is questionable whether any later work of his shows the unclouded and genuine Swift so truly and so effectively. It had, too, a very important effect upon his future career, no clergyman, however earnest or clever, could expect promotion after he had flouted the churches as Swift has done here. It was presumably written in support of the Church of England, but Swift's gift of irony was youthful and irrepressible, he could not withhold his stinging humour from the institution which he presumed to support, and his protests against the popular view, which made him a

scorner of the Church and of religion, were naturally made in vain. The laughter must take the consequences of his laughter: most people cannot tell whether he is laughing at them or with them. Thus Swift found it. No doubt he hugely enjoyed himself while he was writing the *Tale of a Tub*, but he paid very dearly for it later.

For condensed satirical power and sheer intellectual vigour, it would be hard to find a parallel among the satires of the world for this earliest of Swift's outbursts. Reading the book himself late in life, Swift is reported to have exclaimed "Good God! what a genius I had when I wrote that book!" "There is in it," says Dr Johnson, who had nothing whatever in common with Swift, but an invincible antipathy to him, "such a vigour of mind, such a swarm of thoughts, so much of nature, and art, and life." Any reader who can appreciate and enjoy real feats of intellect must be similarly impressed. The satire is so penetrating, the prose so ruthlessly clear, the sentences ringing out one after the other with the sharp precision and force of hammer-blows, the humour so imperious and so pervading we can only wonder dumbly at the power of mind and of language. Not even in *Gulliver's Travels* are these literary qualities richer. The probe has been used for the exposure of human imperfections with a scientific skill and enjoyment which makes us think of the surgeon in a hospital of rare "cases."

The tale of the three brothers, Peter, Martin, and Jack, is in itself simple and original, and wholly adequate for the purpose for which it was designed. But the detailed treatment of it is even more original, much bolder, and much more scathing to the victims. Swift was very indignant when it was charged against him that his brilliant fireworks had all been let off to the dishonour of religion. He insisted that he had done nothing to injure the Church of which he

was a loyal and devoted servant. But in his violent attacks on the Roman and Dissenting Churches, is the English Church really left unassailed? By throwing ridicule upon beliefs which Roman Catholic and Dissenter alike hold as sacred, he is striking at the very foundation of faith, and surely he is approaching very closely the beliefs he is presuming to support. Swift may have been orthodox at heart, but he adopted a very unorthodox way of showing it. It is the scoffer at religion who is delighted with Swift's book, his Grace the Archbishop must have been as much scandalised by it as the Pope. Whatever its words may mean, the tendency of the satire was clearly to make people believe that all or almost all religious observances were based upon an empty pedantry or an ignorant sentimentalism. It was in this sense that Queen Anne and her advisers read it, to Swift's permanent disadvantage.

Yet it is healthy to read this book, not merely as a brilliant intellectual display, but because it brings us into direct contact with a clear and fresh mind in which the hatred of falsehood, sham, and pretentiousness was almost a mania. Swift's defect lay in the fact that he was so much occupied in attacking the abuse of religion, that he had no time to spare for its use. His criticism was magnificent on the destructive side, but, mad with the jerry-building of others, he did not attempt a solid edifice of his own. This defect is the one thing which hinders his exaltation to the hierarchy of literature. If we bear this in mind, and allow for it, while we are reading the *Tale of a Tub*, we are in a position to appreciate properly what Swift means. He would say, "have done with cant, pedantry, and prejudices, and live according to the principles of common-sense." But if he himself had no cant and little pedantry, his prejudices were strong enough. In

the true sense it was only a prejudice which kept his satire from the Church of England. The message of Swift on its best side is, however, just the simple Johnsonian aphorism, "Clear your mind of cant." With what turbid, bitter, terrible weapons he preached his gospel, we are shortly to see.

Short as the *Tale of a Tub* is, its essential parts form little more than a quarter of the whole. The main argument of the book is constantly broken by irreverent digressions, in which some of Swift's most brilliant mind-play is to be found. In them also we have more than a foretaste of his future misanthropy. We see his contempt of human kind, already terrible and unsparing. He pours out his ridicule upon critics in a torrent which might have overwhelmed a less case-hardened species, the whole population of Grub Street is mercilessly pilloried and besmeared with his mud, mankind he conceives to be made up of fools for the vast majority, and he gives a serious dissertation upon the necessity of madness to the commonweal, the great advantages of being mad, with the many types of madness to be found in England. These digressive essays are in short the outpourings of Swift's frightful sarcasm at a time before the world had turned out a really bitter place for him. It is clear that thus early he despised most people, that he had a splendid literary endowment, which included a sense of humour, and that he used his sense of humour to play with the human race as a cat with a mouse before devouring it. Most human delights, from its church parades to its drawing-room gossip, are greeted by him with his loud horse-laugh. This scornful and contemptuous laughter is the characteristic feature in Swift's literary personality. In the *Tale of a Tub* he has the buoyant dogmatism of youth: he expected that the impostors whom he had exposed and, in his own mind, routed, would be annihilated by his arguments,

he lived to see himself beaten by these very inferiors, and *Gulliver's Travels* was the result

Along with the *Tale of a Tub* was printed a shorter satire, the *Battle of the Books*. This has the same vigour and spirit as its more important companion, the same unfaltering wit keeps it moving, but its subject is not of such great and permanent interest. Yet in some form or another the controversy with which Swift dealt is continually recurring. There will always be a class of persons who look upon the past as containing the best models for the present, there will equally surely be always those who make a fetish of the most modern innovation or the latest craze. A certain Charles Boyle had edited a series of *Epistles of Phalaris*, the classical genuineness of which was doubted by the great scholar, Richard Bentley. Swift rushed into the conflict as the friend of the Ancients and the opponent of Bentley, and the result of his intervention was the lively skit with which we are now dealing.

Swift was hopelessly on the wrong side, but we do not suppose that he cared for that. We need not, at all events. We may very well be content to enjoy the originality, the unexpectedness, the wonderful verve of the performance. The parable of the Bee and the Spider, in which Swift concisely embodies his argument, is indeed one of the few delightful vignettes that can be taken from his writings. The spider has spun a web in the library where the ancient and modern books are ready to break out into a quarrel, and the bee has become enmeshed in the spider's web. The spider represents the modern critics, who spin their webs of pedantry out of their own inner parts. The bee represents the ancient learning with its two virtues of sweetness and light, which have been obtained with much labour from nature herself, the spider, feeding on insects and any vermin, can spin nothing but poison.

Apt as it seems, the teaching of this parable is unfair the bee-like character is not of course the monopoly either of the Ancients or of the Moderns, yet we shall all be grateful to Swift for being the first to teach us the need of "sweetness and light" in great literature. It was a pity that he found so little of these, and so much of the vermin, in nature

The battle in which the books take part is lively, and is cleverly done, but the writer has enjoyed his writing too much, and has studied the truth too little, and the book need not be wished longer. The Ancients receive the support of Pallas, whereas the Moderns have only Momus, the god of imitation, to rely upon. Momus calls for the help of the withered goddess of Criticism, by means of whom children are made as wise as their parents, and become the chosen judges in philosophy and letters. The battle rages keenly, and is ended when Bentley and Wotton, the champions of the Moderns, are transfixed together by the lance of Boyle. The humour is genuine and diverting, but is not convincing. It was probably inspired by Temple, who had written in the same cause, and, written as a pleasure for his patron at Moor Park, it was revised in order to give respectable size to the volume which contained the *Tale of a Tub*.

3 Swift's Political Work—It was shortly after the death of Temple that Swift came to London and entered into the excitements of politics, a stage upon which he was to play an important but very worrying part during the next fifteen years. To him politics meant a help on to the ladder of church-preferment. He wanted a bishopric, or at least a deanery, he valued it chiefly as a position of power and influence. Wealth for its own sake he utterly scorned, social tyranny he would not tolerate, but the power to dominate others was an ambition of his domineering

and contemptuous nature which neither success nor failure could modify. He was doomed, in spite of his talents and his services, to perpetual disappointments. The rewards of the politicians were, in his mind, little more than words and flatteries.

It was in 1700 that he went to Ireland, and was consoled for the refusal of a deanery at Derry with the small living of Laracor, where his congregation was of microscopic proportions and his parish duties next to none. His attachment to Laracor was not therefore too strong to prevent him from spending much time in London during the years of his ministry. His support during the following decade was given to the Whigs, who for the most part held the reins of power under Marlborough and Queen Anne, but Swift could obtain nothing from Somers or Sunderland or Halifax except promises, admiration, and complimentary dinners. His journeys to and from Ireland at this time, however, did not exhaust his patience or wear out his genius. A few short pamphlets, richly ironical and humorous, are preserved to assure us of this.

There is, for instance, the famous *Argument against abolishing Christianity*, in which Swift turns his well-polished weapon of ridicule against the deist and the infidel. What a loss it would be, he exclaims, if writers like Collins had not the Christian Church to write about: their occupation would be gone! We must have a formal religion of some sort, so that your freethinker may have a God to renounce, else he may even come to speak ill of the queen and the ministry! The abolition of Christianity would remove the basis of social order, it would upset the Church, and that might result in the establishment of Presbyterianism! Herein lies the serious side of Swift's irony. He had himself been called infidel, but he was in truth almost a fanatical adherent of the national Church. He regarded the Church as

the symbol of order, of respect for institutions, of national morality Upset the Church, and nothing would be safe Let men think for themselves? Fiddlesticks! Most men can think as well as they can fly They must have their religion ready-made for them As they go to their lawyer for information about law, they must rely upon their priest for their theology If they do not, they become immoral, unprincipled atheists Swift's view of religion was essentially that of the man of the world Common-sense and expediency were the foundations of the faith which he publicly professed, he had, no more than the Tolands and Collinses whom he attacked, any sense of the mystical or sentimental side of religion, he scorned all open expression of his emotions or his enthusiasms Yet it is said that in private life his piety was genuine and his mood humble The mystery of things was surely present to the mind of this man who thought so clearly and probed so skilfully the doings of his fellow-men, and he cannot have thought that the mere repetition of any formula, however sacred, was a solution of the mystery Amid his many perplexities, his disappointments, his misanthropy, he regarded the Christian faith as a firm standing-ground, but it did not dispel the mists which closed more thickly around him as the years went by, it did not illuminate his dark soul, nor enable him to understand why virtue should be so often scorned, while vice and stupidity so frequently thrive But in 1706 it was the centre of his hopes—of his worldly hopes, that is—and in the *Argument* it gave him an opportunity of exercising his boisterous irony

To the same period belongs another piece of horse-play which amused the town greatly The "Old Moore" of his day was an astrologer named Partidge, whose predictions aroused the spirit of mischief in Swift, who, under the name of Isaac Bickerstaff,

published a parody of Partridge's oracles, in which the death of Partridge was foretold. Upon the appointed day, the death of Partridge was duly announced, and, in spite of the protests of poor Partridge that he was not dead, the joke was persisted in, and the almanac was killed. So popular was the personality of Bickerstaff, that Richard Steele took up his name as that of the editor of the *Tatler*, in 1709. Like a great schoolboy did Swift enjoy this practical joke, but it seems, even granting that Partridge was an impostor, somewhat degrading for a great genius to adopt the motley and perform the antics of a clown.

In 1710 Swift transferred his support to the Tories. He had not been at home among the Whigs from the first, for, though he accepted all the principles of the revolution, and had no sort of sentiment in favour of the Stuart cause, he was, as we have seen, a very strong churchman, an active supporter of the exclusive privileges of the Church, having little sympathy with the narrow-minded and selfish commercial interests. Now, the real difference between the two parties lay in these points. The landed interest was Tory, the commercial, Whig. The Tory was the High Churchman, while the Whig leaned towards freedom and often to freethought. In joining hands with Harley, therefore, Swift came into his congenial element, he was welcomed with effusion and heartiness, treated as an equal, made acquainted with all the secret moves of the complex political game, in return for which he took into his hands the control of the *Examiner*, a paper which had been started by Matthew Prior, and devoted to it the full force of his great gifts.

Along with Defoe's *Review*, this *Examiner* exercised a sway amounting almost to tyranny over the politicians of the day. It is not, of course, interesting

to-day, because it is essentially one-sided, and deals with subjects whose importance was of the moment only. Its one character is strength, used without scruple or delicacy, without regard for truth or fitness, Swift was eager to prove his sincerity to his new party, and he did it to such effect that for the moment the opposite party was annihilated. When Harley and St John gradually sailed into the secure haven of power, they must have been ready to admit that it was Swift's strenuous work that had set the sails for them. But, though this was so, Swift continued to live on hopes and promises. His position was one of boundless influence, but either the obstinacy of Queen Anne was too great for Harley to overcome, or the minister himself was unwilling to set in too high a position the wit whose irony was so terrible in its onslaught and so elastic in its power of recoil. At all events, no bishopric rewarded the wielder of the *Examiner's* heavy guns.

In these years of success, Swift behaved with a pride and arrogance which seem to be inconsistent with his professed principles. But he had no sentiment about the equality of man, or the like. It was not the lord or the bishop for whom he poured out his scorn: it was the sham and flunkey imitations thereof. Pretence, in any shape or form, he could not abide. The man who was a mere clothes-horse was his contempt. He was certain that his own abilities entitled him to any and the highest posts, in the days of his power he delighted to make the highest in the land pay court to him, he truckled to no one, and tyrannised as a dictator over the high Tories, to whose cause he gave so much. He boasted of his haughty pride. He confessed that an ambition of his life was realised when he was treated like a lord, and found that his abilities had forced men to recognise him as surely as though

he drove his coach and six But this recognition was not for long He was appointed Dean of St Patrick's in 1713, and regarded this as a mere stepping-stone to bigger things But it was his only recompense for his years of toil It was not long before his party was hurled from office with the ignominious stigma of disloyalty upon its leaders He was forty-seven when he left London for his deanery at Dublin, crushed and disappointed

According to the testimony of friends, Swift bore up manfully under the blow which drove him out of the life which was more or less congenial to him But his later works show well enough that his spirit was soured irremediably He hated Ireland and all things Irish He fretted and fumed at being rendered impotent by the effectual banishment from London which his dean's duties implied He chafed at being left to rot away "like a poisoned rat in a hole" His solitude goaded him into madness All the milk in his disposition turned into gall The keen feeling of his own superiority, which had flowered into arrogance when life was sunny with him, now overflowed in bitter hatred of anything and anybody, in impious condemnation of the whole human race His pride became savage and intolerable to himself He did his duties fiercely and with a certain thoroughness Now and then he came to England As a member of a club of wits, he saw occasionally Pope, Gay, and Arbuthnot, a cold friendship for Addison was more or less retained But he could find no political opportunities for some years, and meanwhile his mysterious disease was deepening the gloom which became more and more ominous of madness

Anon, however, he flashed like a baleful comet across the peaceful heavens~ Walpole was carefully laying the foundation of his long spell of power, and to Swift, as to Pope, Walpole was the embodiment of

everything he hated Without culture, without any appreciation of learning, cold, prosaic, coarse, dominated by low and base motives, Walpole took no heed of the wits Under his rule English society lost some of the ground which it had made under Addison and the Queen Anne circle Swift watched it all as a caged lion watches the vanishing of its expected food At last, in 1720, he flew at the odious government with a pamphlet on Irish trade

This pamphlet expresses in memorable form the keen sense of injustice under which the Irish laboured Though he hated the Irish, Swift also hated injustice, and he hated it all the more when it was perpetrated by the group of Philistines who had unclawed him and laughed at his powerless exile He thus became Ireland's champion, demanding protection for Irish goods against the English, and urging the Irishman to boycott all English products The force of this polemic is, however, overwhelmed by the much greater intensity of the *Drapier's Letters*, which began to appear in 1722

These letters owe their origin to the patent, given to a man named Wood, for the supply of copper coins to Ireland, in which apparently innocent act the hot indignation of Swift saw another injustice to his oppressed countrymen And no doubt there was a certain amount of roguery involved in the purchase and carrying out of the contract But the contractor could not be expected to do the work for nothing, and there is no reason for supposing that Wood's halfpence were not of the stipulated value Swift, however, in the four letters which are supposed to come from a Dublin draper, convinced the Irish that an inferior copper coinage had been foisted upon them to the exclusion of gold and silver This he did with every exaggeration, every form of indignation, which his very savage humour now suggested to him. These letters are not temperate arguments,

they are violent appeals to the passions, and generally to the worst passions, of his readers. They produce anger, not conviction. They smother a small wrong in specious and shameless unreason. But their effect was tremendous. The coins were withdrawn, the Government was so disturbed as to menace Swift with imprisonment. But all the more was he the hero of the Dublin populace. He was able to tell Walpole that 10,000 men would be required to arrest him. His popularity was immense, but more than the popularity he relished the fear which he had thrown upon his adversaries. He probably knew that his cause did not demand such a display of excited writing, his vicious reasonings were based far more upon spite than upon political economy or love of the Irish, but on this very account he probably enjoyed their success the more.

Yet the misery of Ireland must have touched his morbidly sensitive nature very closely, else we cannot account for the terribly bitter satire in his *Modest Proposal* of 1729. This proposal was made in order to prevent the young children of Ireland from becoming a burden on their parents, and to make them at the same time beneficial to the public. Swift's plan, set out without any apparent excitement or passion, was that the children should be used for food by the landlords, who, having already devoured the parents, seem to have the best claim to the children. The state of mind into which Swift had fallen can be imagined from the intensely serious tone of this terrible pamphlet. It is written with a concentrated gall which will allow neither laughter nor disgust, it was intended to give a shock to mankind, and even now it cannot be read without a sickening feeling.

It is terrible to think that Swift lived on in this state of gloom for sixteen more years. Stella, the one person who seems to have had the key to his serenest mind, was dead. He had visited London for

the last time, and said farewell to Pope, Arbuthnot, Bolingbroke, the only men who appreciated his genius. He had managed to quarrel with all the Irish bishops. He had brought the affairs of his deanery into order, and become master of his clergy. We only see him in occasional livid glimpses all through his life in Ireland. He is moody, solitary, inhospitable, parsimonious, even miserly. He is racked with a painful disease, now known to physicians as a labyrinthine vertigo, fits of giddiness are common, attacking him in all places and at all times, recurrent deafness maddens him. To those who will accept his absolute kingship, to his servants, and to the poor, he is sometimes kind and always considerate. We find that, in spite of his avarice and of the meanness of his personal habits, he is not rich. In truth, he is only not generous to himself. He writes a few letters in a strain of forced mirth, almost as pathetic as his bitterest satire. In these he does not discuss high matters of religion or philosophy. He prefers to make Latin riddles and anagrams, to torture his intellect into making dog Latin proverbs, to use his ingenuity in the fabrication of pure nonsense. *Vive la bagatelle* has become his life motto. A terrible despair is this, when life is bereft of all noble aims, and can only be filled with empty trifles. Out of his gloom emerges this laughter without joy, this mirth which has in it nothing human. Occasionally, during a lucid interval, a natural letter leaves him, a few short works fill up his many empty hours, but for the most part we are with a dying satirist, conscious of his fallen powers. The verses *On the Death of Dr Swift* tell us his own anticipations and hopes. But the melancholy grows deeper, and the life still hangs on. Fearful bursts of temper, equally fearful fits of morose silence. The end is madness. He drags on till 1745, his pains gradually leave him, and a merciful torpor supervenes. In October he "expires,

a diveller and a show" A Latin epitaph in St Patrick's Cathedral tells us that even he lies now in peace, where a fierce indignation can tear his heart no more

4 *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) — This brilliant genius, perplexing problem alike to the psychologist and to the physician, thus perished as miserably as man could And what, as the result of his vast talents, has he left for a memorial to the world? The answer is, chiefly *Gulliver's Travels* This is one of the few books which, like *Robinson Crusoe*, give delight to everyone who can read, to youth as much as to age Accepted by children for its straightforward story, it is read by their fathers for its deeper and more elusive meaning For, if you have followed what has been said about Swift's nature, you will see that it was not in him to write a mere tale, and you will be prepared to believe that *Gulliver's Travels* is, in some sense or other, a satire It was most certainly written as such Swift was one of the members of the Scriblerus Club, formed in 1713 with the object of composing a sort of united satire on the follies of the time, its members included Pope and Arbuthnot, and *Gulliver's Travels* represents Swift's contribution to the concern * It did not appear till 1726, but it had probably been in preparation during the first thirteen years of Swift's exile in Ireland At all events, the tone of the last portion is in accord with the hot anger of the *Drapier's Letters*, while the first two books are not so bitter as many of Swift's earlier satires

As a book for children, *Gulliver's Travels*, properly edited, has always been popular, and this is on account of the charming simplicity and naturalness of the tales The naive reader is simply deceived by Swift's method, and never for a moment pauses to doubt the existence of the men of Lilliput and Brobdingnag The inhabitants of these places are

not fairies or giants, they are simply little men and big men respectively, performing no wonders, but living the human lives which even a child's imagination can follow. In this respect the book is delightfully childlike, and reveals to us an aspect of Swift which appears again in his *Journal to Stella*. He had the simplicity of all truly great men.

The older reader, however, soon becomes aware of the underlying satire. But it is not easy to say in a few words what its exact meaning is, or even what its object is. Swift intended it to anger and to shock mankind, but, is this all? Certain parts of *Gulliver's Travels* do disgust us, but in other places a very much more serious purpose is manifest. The book is not wholly a criticism, or rather, it is, in the first two parts at least, constructively critical. One has only to turn to the sixth and seventh chapters of the second part to see something more than mere criticism in Swift. Thus, of the Brobdingnagians, we read

The learning of this people is very defective, consisting only in morality, history, poetry, and mathematics, wherein they must be allowed to excel. But the last of these is wholly applied to what may be useful in life, to the improvement of agriculture, and all mechanical arts, so that among us it would be little esteemed. And as to ideas, entries, abstraction, and transcendental, I could never drive the least conception into their heads.

This, along with many other passages, is the language of the advocate as well as the critic. It is the language of a more incisive and more modern *Utopia*. Nevertheless, though we must not be blind to this aspect of Gulliver, the essence of the book is its satire. Swift found the world and its inhabitants intolerably contemptible, but he had not the passion of the reformer; he had given up such a task as that of improving mankind as a hopeless dream. And *Gulliver's Travels*, as a whole, is to be regarded as a

series of visions of the human race, as seen by a being from another sphere. In this sense it is a kind of allegory of life, comparable with *The Pilgrim's Progress*.

No objection whatever can be taken to the first two parts, in which Gulliver visits Lilliput and Brobdingnag, and not very much to the third. Here we come across a variety of queer creatures of great and little qualities. The Struldbrugs, whom Gulliver met at Luggnagg, remain most vividly in the memory. In this awful picture of immortal old age we can see the sort of ghost that would commonly haunt his own imagination. In the fourth part, however, Swift has touched the very depths of misanthropy. Here he has shown humanity stripped of all but its bestial elements. The loathsome Yahoos, in subjection to the Houyhnhnms, a breed of intelligent horses, surely represent the worst that has ever been thought of human kind. Through these Yahoos, through their degraded and filthy lusts, Swift has sent his most terrible message to his fellow-men. He is not a mere cynic here. He is not scornful, not indignant. He is filled with spite and revenge. The world has used him ill; he will expose its most loathsome sores. Man has wounded him; he replies by showing him that he is a Yahoo. Brooding over the most base, playing with the most bestial things in human nature, the compound which Swift obtains is this most loathsome caricature. Yet, while we cannot forgive the offended egoism which took such a revenge, we must be merciful to the tortured mind which, from the depth of its despair, produced a book that, with all its aberrations, is entertaining, stimulating, wise.

5 Stella and Vanessa—One other episode in Swift's life is important to us. At Moor Park he became acquainted with Esther Johnson, a lady who, under the name of Stella, played an important part

in his life. For her he formed a friendship which fascinated her and held her close to him for life. During the years 1710-3, while he was embedded in eager political manœuvres, Swift wrote to Stella in Dublin a series of letters, which have been edited and now form the *Journal to Stella*, the most purely delightful of all his works. The letters are very simple, tender, and affectionate, like those of a father to a young child. It is pleasant to peer into the privacy of this correspondence, and to see the whole-hearted joy with which the great mind of the great misanthrope told Stella the little doings of his days. It is not the thunders of the political heavens that reverberate in these letters. The simple goings to and fro, the dinners, the dresses, the people he met these, and the ordinary gossip of an ordinary correspondent are the material of the letters. The language is even childish: it is known as the "little language" from its infant-like character. Queer ciphers gave writer and receiver apparently an equal pleasure. MD (my dear) means Stella, Pdfr is Swift himself (Poor dear foolish rogue), there are others, like Lele and Ppt, which have no certain meaning. It is a strange, babbling dialect for the terrible Swift to be talking, but the *Journal to Stella* is both charming and valuable.

It is not certain whether Swift was married to Stella or not. There is no hint in any of his writings that Swift knew what love in the ordinary sense of the word meant. He seems to have been incapable by his constitution of falling in love. But Stella was a woman of intellectual and elevated character, and she, with her companion, Mrs Dingley, lived contentedly with Swift till her death in 1728. Unfortunately, Swift hypnotised another lady, called Vanessa in his writings, who died of grief on discovering that her infatuation was hopeless. To her Swift wrote one of his poems, *Cadenus and Vanessa*,

in it he declares no love except that of a friend, he declares, in fact, that his age and position make him unable to love, but that he would like always to be regarded as Vanessa's faithful counsellor and teacher. In spite of this, Vanessa could not escape from the spell which Swift cast over her. She wrote to Stella to ask if she were Swift's wife. Stella replied that she was, and showed Vanessa's letter to Swift. In a terrible rage Swift broke off all communication with the hapless lady, very shortly after, she died. There is much that is mysterious in the whole business, which makes it attractive to some minds. But Swift, although imprudent and unconventional, could not help the spell he exercised over Vanessa, and to Stella he seems to have acted in a manner which retained both her admiration and her love.

Incidentally, we have mentioned the poems of Swift, but only a word need be said about them. He is an easy rhymers, especially in the octosyllabic metre. He is humorous, forceful, clever, clear. But he had not the poet's imagination, and his poetry is only his prose versified. The same irony is there, the same deep heart-sickness, the same bitterness, the same love of squalor and filth. The verses *On the Death of Dr Swift* are rich in the biting sarcasm so freely distributed through his prose. The vivid but morbid imagination plays on the circumstances of his own death with an evident joy. Thus thinks he of his intimates

Poor Pope will grieve a month, and Gay
A week, and Arbuthnot a day
St John himself will scarce forbear
To bite his pen and drop a tear
The rest will give a shrug and cry,
"I'm sorry—but we all must die!"

It is only necessary to read these verses and *Cadenus and Vanessa* to do justice to Swift as a poet. But the poet needs wings, and Swift had none. His

fleet intellect could not rise, it rather sought the dark earth-holes and unlovely swamps

6 Arbuthnot—Swift's place as the first wit of his time was more than half-threatened in his own day, by Dr John Arbuthnot (1667-1735), famous as a doctor, a wit, a scholar, and a gentleman. He was enthusiastically admired by such bitter critics as Pope and Swift, and seems to have been a man of real culture and genuine character. He was the moving spirit of the Scriblerus Club, and his *Memoirs of Martin Scriblerus* have a humorous flavour even now, and certainly hits the pretentious pedant hardly enough. *The Art of Political Lying* is in the vein of Swift, and so effective as to have been attributed to the greater genius. In *The History of John Bull* (1713), Arbuthnot joins Swift in supporting Harley and attacking Marlborough. But the satire is too ephemeral, and we cannot interest ourselves very keenly in anything of Arbuthnot's except his personality. He is a philosopher of the town, a man of science who is also full of literary enthusiasm.

CHAPTER X

The Periodical Essay—Addison and Steele

Addison Early Work *The Campaign* Steele *The Tatler*
The Spectator its High Merits *Cato* Addison's Character
Estimates of Tickell and Pope Dennis

Joseph Addison (1672-1719)

1704	<i>The Campaign</i>	1711-14	<i>The Spectator</i>
1710	<i>The Whig Examiner.</i>	1715-16	<i>The Freeholder</i>
1713	<i>Cato</i> acted		

Richard Steele (1671-1729)

1701	<i>The Christian Hero</i>	1709	<i>The Tatler</i>
1705	<i>The Tender Husband</i> acted	1713	<i>The Englishman</i>

1. **Joseph Addison (1672-1719)**—In their different ways, Defoe and Swift have led us into the turbid and demoralising political life of the early portion of the eighteenth century. The conception of life which circumstances had forced upon the genius of these men was distorted and ignoble. They lived in an atmosphere of strife and intrigue, they fought with weapons, in the one case of cunning, in the other of scorn. In leaving them for the company of Joseph Addison and his friend, Dick Steele, we pass into more serene and more humane moods. Politics cease to be the main topic. The general conditions of social life are brought into our view. We are compelled to interest ourselves in the doings

and feelings of ordinary men and women, and we find the occupation charming. The mighty scorn of Swift and the wretched lying of Defoe shook our faith in humanity, the genial laughter of Addison and the careless good-nature of Steele shall be our restorative. The drastic treatment of Dr Swift has worn our spirit out, we go to Addison for a little recreation, for change and rest.

No less than Defoe or Swift, Addison found society a hornet's nest of vice and imperfection, but he did not adapt himself to it, nor rail madly against it. He saw the "falsehood of extremes." He knew quite well that literature and life were equally dominated by ignoble and degrading ideals, but he knew also that the great majority of Englishmen had no real love for loose living. The comedies of men like Wycherley and Congreve spoke the witty and licentious language of the Restoration, but only the court circle patronised them, the intelligent middle-class, rapidly growing in numbers and in influence, awaited the guidance of some writer, by whose aid they could avoid on the one hand, the extreme of fashionable vice, and on the other hand, the opposite pole of intolerant and intolerable Puritanism. The instinct of the great body of cultivated Englishmen led them away from the gross immorality of the contemporary theatre, but equally it revolted from the inhuman doctrine that all pleasure was wicked and unlawful.

The character of Joseph Addison admirably fitted him to play the part of mediator between the interests of high morality and those of frail humanity. In a very quiet way, and more perhaps by his personal influence than by his writings, Addison reformed public manners and elevated public taste. The centre of a knot of literary men who gathered at Button's Coffee-house, he was honoured as the perfect scholar-gentleman. He was everywhere admired and re-

spected, Swift and Pope, as well as Steele, acknowledged the force of his personality. What was it that caused this universal admiration? In general, Addison was shy, reserved, and proud, cold, sarcastic, and moody, to his friends he was the apostle of culture, of polished wit, of immaculate character. He was the centre of a new refinement, the standard of manners. The roughness of the country squire, the ignorance of the country rector, the Philistine selfishness of the city merchant, the self-assertiveness of the vulgar journalist, these were anathema in the Addisonian circle. In their place, Addison installed the polish, the grace, the dignity, of the true gentleman. ✓

We may say at once that Addison was no hero, that no martyr's blood ran in his veins. The storm-blasts of Swift's genius outraged his nice sense of what was proper and gentlemanlike. He was never betrayed into an unbalanced enthusiasm, into excess of any sort. He was not strenuous, nor eager. Such reform as he was able to make in the manners of society was in the nature of a lubricant, affecting the surface chiefly, but destroying much friction nevertheless. He was an adroit and skilful man of the world, and had none of the temper of the saint. He could not preach except by means of polite irony and well-bred sneers. He thus played a very valuable but never heroic part, while we do not fear him as we fear Swift, we cannot love him, only respect and admire.

The son of a Wiltshire clergyman, educated at Charterhouse and at Oxford, fortune from the first was partial to Addison. He attracted attention early by his astonishing cleverness, particularly in the fashionable art of making Latin verses, he came to London and was introduced to the Whig magnates, Lord Somers and Charles Montague, then the chief ministers of William the Third. So highly did these

men think of his talents, that Montague procured for him a pension of £300 a year in order to enable him to take a continental tour. Though there was no immediate need for the services of men like Addison, the Whig leaders foresaw that there soon might be, and they deemed it advisable to have Addison's pen on their side. Thus, Addison was retained as a political pamphleteer almost at the same time as Defoe started upon his very different journalistic career.

After hesitating for some time over the question of entering the Church, an idea which either through diffidence or prudence he gave up, Addison set out for his foreign tour in 1699. He visited France, Italy, and most of the important countries of Europe, and his letters to friends at home—such as Lord Halifax (Montague)—have a certain interest, showing the influence of what he saw upon his broadening mind. He was deeply impressed with the great art-treasures of Italy, but equally prejudiced against the French and all their works. The classic repose and dignity were perhaps native to his character, but they were also educated and refined by his reverent study of the Italian cathedrals.

— On the accession of Queen Anne, Addison's pension failed, Anne was at first partial to the High Tories, and Addison's friends were driven from office. He returned to England, and, refusing an offer of a tutorship from the Duke of Somerset, he became a member of a famous club, known as the Kit-Kat Club, from the fact that its meetings took place at the coffee-house of one Christopher Catt. All the prominent Whigs of the time who were interested in letters were members, its founder was Jacob Tonson, one of the earliest professional publishers. The association of literature with politics is thus exemplified again, but Addison was no mere hack like Defoe, he mixed with the statesmen on equal terms.

Though at times pressed hard by circumstances, there was little of struggle in his life. His was no fierce battle for fame, like Defoe's, no vain duel with circumstances, like Swift's, but a smooth drift into fortune on an unrippled stream.

Addison had not long to wait for profitable employment. A writer was needed to celebrate in suitable immortal verse the glorious victory of 1704. Addison was recommended. The tale is told by Pope that the Chancellor of the Exchequer found him lodged in a humble garret up three flights of stairs. The poem was not long in the making, and as a reward for it, its author obtained a commissioner-ship in the Excise.

But *The Campaign*, as the poem is called, cannot detain us here by its literary value, it has dignity, but no inspiration. It shows us the poverty of poetic genius at the disposal of England in 1704, but it led to an Under-Secretaryship for Addison. A few prosperous years followed, an honourable friendship with Swift, an attempt to write an opera which was a failure. Then his party went out of power, and Addison set on foot *The Whig Examiner* as an antidote to Prior's Tory *Examiner*. But he did not like hard blows, and his paper only ran for five issues, any effect it might have had was devoured by the flames of Swift's *Examiner*, which, in the later part of 1710, came to overwhelm the tottering Whig ministry.

2 The Tatler—Richard Steele (1672-1729)—The misfortunes of his party, however, gave Addison the opportunity of discovering the path which led to his real and enduring fame. Hitherto he had been, in the jargon of the world, a successful man, he had won for himself place, influence, and powerful friends. No man commanded a more general respect than he. But he owes it to the brilliant initiative of his friend, Steele, that his influence and his character are able

to pervade this and future generations. He occupies a sure place in the affections of readers through his papers in the *Spectator*, which began to appear in 1711.

The idea of the *Spectator* was contained in Steele's publication, the *Tatler*, which introduced itself to the world in the year 1709. Richard Steele is one of those men of whom lovers of literature always think with affection rather than respect. He was a man with a hundred faults and failings of the easily pardonable sort, a dashing cavalry officer who was always in debt, and often in liquor, but who was, at the same time, generous and genuine, incapable of anything mean, equally incapable of injuring any person but himself. He was one of Nature's own gentlemen, little altered by education or society. His high spirits and good humour have become almost proverbial. Eager, impetuous, impulsive, he had none of Addison's tact, none of his dignity of manner, at the same time none of his coldness or reserve. Rake as he was, his moral ideal was lofty and genuine, his religion fearless and pure, his life clean and open. Such faults as he had were, in short, faults of the head rather than of the heart. For his freedom with the wine-bottle, he alone had to pay the penalty, his unthinking generosity and his utter inability to live within his income caused his tender and sensitive nature all its many sorrows and perplexities. In spite of duns and bailiffs, in spite of bitter remorse and repentances, poor Dick was always cheerful, hopeful, considerate, sympathetic. He never lost his love for his fellow-men, his desire to befriend and to elevate them. ✓

It was this creature of impulse and of sentiment who set about the task of reforming the general tone of public morals. His qualifications for his self-imposed duty were numerous. He had been educated at Oxford, but had thrown up his career there to

enter the army, where he led a wild and dissipated life. Yet it is characteristic of the man that he wrote during that time his book of morals and religion called *The Christian Hero*. It was inspired by and dedicated to Lord Cutts, under whom he served in the wars. Its tone is unexceptionable; it might, in fact, have been the work of a divine. Between 1702 and 1705 three comedies of his were produced, they were distinguished by their purity of tone and sentiment, but on that account chiefly they enjoyed no success. They are rather insipid productions, it is true, but *The Lying Lover* and *The Tender Husband* have a certain small flavour of the true comic spirit. They are important as an attempt to restore decency to the drama. They also brought Steele into public notice, he became a member of the Kit-Kat Club, and made the acquaintance of Swift, the office of public Gazetter was procured for him in 1707.

It was his work in this last position which, added to his wide knowledge of town life, enabled him to conceive the idea of the *Tatler*. The society which was congenial to Steele congregated at the coffee-houses, where men would sit for hours, discussing politics, literature, society and its members. At these coffee-houses might be met politicians and patrons like Halifax and Harley, men of wit and learning like Swift and Addison, only Defoe seems to have been outside the circle of coffee-house statesmen. Men went there to pick up the latest news, but also to garner the latest ideas. They wished to peep behind the political scenes, they also wished to be up-to-date in culture and in art, to follow the best fashion in criticism and in conversation, to adopt the new principles of manners and the new canons of taste. They found life slow, but at the coffee-houses there was both stimulus and instruction.

The needs of this circle gave Steele his opportunity.

It occurred to him that the written gossip of the coffee-houses would be a most acceptable present to the man about town, and it was under this inspiration that the *Tatler* was conceived. But the method of the paper had really been used by Swift when he exposed poor Partridge. The difference lay in the fact that what Swift did occasionally, Steele would do regularly and systematically. In the first issue he says

The general purposes of this paper is to expose the false arts of life, to pull off the disguises of cunning, vanity, and affectation, and to recommend a general simplicity in our dress, our discourse, and our behaviour

Clearly the aim was to instruct as well as to amuse. It wished to discuss matters of general interest from a serious point of view, it wished to deal with everyday life humorously but, when occasion demanded, severely.

While its moral intention, however, was never very far from the mind of its editor, who was never so happy as when he was posed as a preacher, it was natural that the main object of the *Tatler* should be the entertainment of its readers. What they read in its pages they would hear again discussed in the clubs at the coffee-houses. Moreover, many of the *Tatler's* first readers were women: the title of the paper was, in fact, derived from Steele's expectation of this. The light pen was thus a necessity, and chronicle of less importance than gossip. News of the ordinary kind was given, advertisements were printed, the whole style of the paper was that of a newspaper. But the news element was always subordinate, and pure politics, in spite of Steele's strong Whig principles, never formed a large feature in the *Tatler*. As the paper went on, its character developed in accordance with Steele's original principles, the significance of which he did not at the first appreciate. More and more the paper became

a commentary upon the conduct of men, the essay, rather than the record, became its characteristic feature

We have said that the idea of the *Tatler* was Swift's. The very name which Swift adopted in exposing Partridge was also used as a pseudonym by Steele. Under the disguise of Isaac Bickerstaff, he made his editorial pronouncements. His free and frank manner of restoring Isaac to public favour choked any objections that Swift might have had to the proceeding. Whether Swift was in the secret or not, we cannot say, but no political differences would have caused him to fail in perception of the merits of the new paper. It was an immediate success. As adroitly as Defoe, Steele had filled up a gap. Three times a week the *Tatler* appeared, but it was not too often. The successive issues were looked for as eagerly as we expect our newspaper or review at their stated times. Men and women found the subjects in which they were interested treated in a manner which amused them without offending their sense of decency, they found the popular opinion pronounced in a manner which enabled all to understand, in a style clear, precise, humorous and intelligible.

The matter was originally divided into five portions, according as its source was Will's or White's, or the Grecian, or the St James's coffee-house, or the editor's own apartment. The portion addressed from Will's coffee-house contained criticisms of poetry and the drama, it was a famous meeting-place of men of letters in Dryden's time, and still kept up its character. From White's chocolate-house in St James's Street came "all accounts of gallantry, pleasure and entertainment", it was a favourite rendezvous of men of fashion, and was notorious for the gambling that went on there. At St James's coffee-house the political set mainly

congregated, hence the *Tatler* obtained his foreign news and his general political information. The Grecian coffee-house was the resort of men of scholarship and learning. From this we may observe the width of Steele's appeal, but it is only in the first few numbers that this whole design is fully adhered to. The papers from the Grecian coffee-house soon disappear, those from the St James's soon follow, by the hundredth number, those from White's and Will's have become very rare. Isaac does everything. The paper has taken the form of an essay on whatever subject may happen to interest the editor. It is in these numbers that we find the most valuable work of Steele. It is here that he plays his part of reformer of morals. Aware that his own life did not justify him in assuming such a position, he kept up the fiction of Isaac's editorship, even though it was well known who Isaac was. What he could not do in his own person, he claimed that the astrologer could do. His attacks on the immorality of the theatre, on duelling, on gambling and the common forms of dissipation, lack nothing in vigour, in sincerity, and in influence.

The style of Steele has suffered unfairly from the inevitable comparison that must be made between it and Addison's. It is rough and unpolished. Like the man himself, it is hurried, impetuous, on certain themes eloquent, generally clear and effective. It lies between the harsh and downright lucidity of Defoe's style and the genial grace of Addison's. Steele wrote in obedience to his feelings more frequently than Addison did. He has given us rough sketches where Addison has given finished pictures. Steele was too careless and too impatient, to become a real artist. His was the dashing and brilliant initiative, Addison's was the cold workmanship of the artist. What Steele began, Addison carried out. Even in Steele's most finished essays, in that beautiful account

of his father's death in one of the *Tatlers*, there is a something incomplete, tenderness, sympathy, humanity, he has in abundance, laughter and tears are alike at his command, but he managed them crudely and without skill. He is never reposeful or subdued. Yet the *Tatler* is more than the embryo *Spectator*. It has a character of its own. What it loses in fineness, it gains in vigour, what it lacks in intellect, it has in emotion and humanity.

3 The *Spectator* (1711-12)—The first contribution which Addison made to the *Tatler* was in No. 18. Altogether he contributed forty-two papers to Steele's production, and it was perhaps under his influence that the change in the tone of the *Tatler* gradually took place. After running to 271 numbers, the *Tatler* came to an end, not because Steele was tired of it, nor because it had ceased to please, but on political grounds. Some weeks later—that is early in 1711—the first number of the *Spectator* appeared, and the brilliance of this new undertaking has caused us unduly to ignore its forerunner and inspirer. Addison's daily paper is the perfection of the idea which underlay the *Tatler*.

The form of the newspaper was to a great extent abandoned, and instead of supposing himself to be a mere retailer of coffee-house talk, the editor of the *Spectator* takes boldly and plainly the position of critic of life and manners. In the first number, which appeared on Thursday, 1st March 1711, the *Spectator* gives a character-sketch of himself, in which he not only explains his standpoint as a humorist and mere spectator of life, but also gives us a foretaste of that delicate humour which is his chief charm. The autobiographic hints are delightful: the premature gravity of demeanour which led him to throw away his rattle before he was two months old, his silence at school and at college, which prompted his schoolmaster to say of him that

his "parts were solid and would wear well", his visit to Egypt to take the measure of a pyramid as an illustration of his thirst for knowledge, his round of clubs, where he is taken now for a politician, now for a Jewish stock-jobber—all are described in that aggravatingly simple style, so easy and so suave, but so difficult to achieve. Yet through life he has been no more than a spectator, mixing with men freely, but never opening his lips except at his club. And thus he thinks he has qualified himself to be a critic of life.

Thus I live in the world, rather as a spectator of mankind than as one of the species, by which means I have made myself a speculative statesman, soldier, merchant, and artisan, without ever meddling with any practical part in life. I am very well versed in the theory of an husband, or a father, and can discern the errors in the economy, business, and diversions of others, better than those who are engaged in them, as standers-by discover blots, which are apt to escape those who are in the game. I never espoused any party with violence, and am resolved to observe an exact neutrality between the Whigs and the Tories, unless I shall be forced to declare myself by the hostilities of either side. In short, I have acted in all the parts of my life as a looker-on, which is the character I intend to preserve in this paper.

This position as the detached spectator, looking down on the whirligig of life from the cold heights of philosophic indifference, was an admirable point of advantage for the editor of the *Spectator*. But we may doubt whether the result could be in any way a complete interpretation of life. The battle with the world and with nature must be felt by him who would render it fully intelligible. The warmth of human feelings, the thrilling pulse of man's hot blood in his veins, the passions tempestuous and calm, are the inward nerves which make the outward mechanism what it is and act as it does. Can the spectator who can only see the outer show disclose to us the mystery of the controlling mind? What can the mere spectator, with his icy impartiality dominated

by a fastidious intellect, know about the great main-springs of life? All we could expect of him would be at the best a humorous and accurate record of the superficial aspects of mankind

But Addison aimed at more than this. In one of his early essays he compares himself to Socrates, and takes upon himself the mission of a popular philosopher. He wished to make philosophy less the monopoly of the study and the university, he would bring it into the club and into the market-place. Himself a man of wide reading and generous learning, he felt that he had no right to live a completely silent life. He must somehow reveal the secret of his knowledge and his culture. And in this he to some extent succeeded. Literature and the drama did become fashionable subjects of small-talk, matters of frequent discussion at the clubs. Among men of the town the standard of social manners, and the tone of general conversation did rise, in response to the example which the *Spectator* set. But though this was good, it was little enough in comparison with the ideal with which Addison set out. The opinions of the spectator were adopted unthinkingly, and these opinions were often of the shallowest value, and very rarely were they well thought out. The papers in the *Spectator* which deal with religion, or history, or literature, are with a few exceptions unequal to their themes, uninteresting, and often dull. They were written, it must be remembered, rapidly for daily publication, and the entire absence of perfunctory work would be surprising. We need not, therefore, condemn Addison because the spectator was not equal to the discussion of religious problems, of constitutional history, of the art of *Paradise Lost*. These things were too big for his method of treatment. a popular philosophy is a contradiction in terms. The spectator has not the eyes, and he had not in Addison's case the leisure, to probe ruthlessly into

the heart of things, to analyse as Swift did the fundamentals of human nature

It is when we come to the spectator's proper sphere, that of observation and comment, that we realise the success of Addison and the nature of his genius. In the second number of the *Spectator* we are introduced to the author's few friends, the members of his club. The characters of these men are carefully developed at full length as the work proceeds, and some of them are among the immortal creations of English literature. By means of a few exceedingly delicate touches, Addison has painted a few complete personalities who are wholly charming companions. There is the ever-lovable Sir Roger de Coverley, with his delightfully naive good-nature, his amiable pomposity, his instinctive beneficence—a reminder of a vanishing type. There is, next to him, Sir Andrew Freeport, the thriving British merchant whose favourite maxim is, "A penny saved is a penny got," but who is nevertheless a man of real sense and plain talk, though his mind runs chiefly on to the methods of improving trade. Then we meet the young templar who prefers the study of the drama to reading Littleton or Coke, and knows the orations of Cicero and Demosthenes better than the reports of his own law courts. Still another friend is Captain Sentry, who represents the army—a modest man, ready to tell his military tales when called upon, with only one complaint, namely, that impudence is a better passport to high position than modesty. Lastly, there is the old rake, Will Honeycomb, well dressed, and skilled in those arts which are pleasing to the female sex, "he can smile when one speaks to him, and laughs easily." Life has always been easy with Will, so that "time has made but very little impression, either by wrinkles on his forehead, or traces in his brain." He is always looked upon by the other members of the club as the fine gentleman. One other

gentleman occasionally looks in at the club he is a clergyman, "a very philosophic man, of general learning, great sanctity of life, and the most exact good breeding" "He seldom introduces the subject he speaks upon", but when he is present, the club is always earnest to talk upon some divine topic, which he always treats with authority

These are the Spectator's friends, and they represent the various classes whom he hoped to interest. They stand for all that was best and most cultured in English society at the time. But each character is an individual as well as a type. The figure of Sir Roger, whether he is at home or at church, visiting the abbey or the theatre, on the bench or among the gipsies, is always charming and just, a masterpiece of character-drawing. Read the essay on Sir Roger at the Play, observe how few and how masterly are the touches which set the simple old man clearly before us. All the essays in which Sir Roger appears are in the same way perfect. The real Addison is there—the keen and interested observer whom no detail of conduct escapes, the acute recorder of the oddities and mannerisms which are significant in human lives.

Above his fine faculty of observation, Addison had in a large degree the all-necessary gift of humour. His humour is like a fragrance over all his social essays, it cannot be analysed, nor described. Except that it is narrower in range, it can be compared only with Shakespeare's. It implies the same large tolerance, the same divine impartiality, a little of the same seriousness of outlook. Its laughter is reserved for the oddities and the pardonable frailties of men. Its sarcasm and its scorn, which show themselves like an almost imperceptible smile, are directed mildly at contemptible and pretentious things. Irony and innuendo are favourite weapons of Addison, and are rarely far from his mind. It is as if the world amuses, but in his more melancholy

moods disgusts him. We imagine that he had something in common with his friend, Swift, but his mind was somewhat soothed by success, and reined by his dislike of all excess or lack of self-control. The humour, often kindly, is not always so. He can laugh at the follies of Will Honeycomb, at the busy idleness of Will Wimble, at the Ladies' Association for Protection against the other Sex, but we are uneasily conscious of a slight superciliousness, a dash of contempt, that lies behind. It is the presence of this irony, so carefully veiled, so intellectual, so carefully controlled as to be almost imperceptible, that seems to us to be the special quality of the humour of Addison. The "Dissection of a Coquette's Heart," the "Essay on the Transmigration of Souls," that on Cat-calls, that on Party Patches, among many others equally characteristic, illustrate the special humour of Addison very well.

In its more serious pages, the *Spectator* does not wholly fail. As we have said, those essays which deal with the manners of men are the most successful, but in the essay on Westminster Abbey, and in several of his excellent allegories, Addison has touched other themes with charm. Many essays deal with the foibles and frivolities of the female sex, they are treated with a light but sympathetic hand, and one of the best results of the *Spectator's* work was the higher conception of woman's place in life. The unworthy idea of the gentler sex which was common in the previous generation, and for which woman herself was largely responsible, has given way to a higher and truer view. Treating her fribbling vanities, with the stinging ridicule of his amiable irony, Addison nevertheless led woman to think of her dignity, her modesty, and her refinement. In establishing for both sexes a rational system of morals, free from coarseness and based upon the general sense of society, the *Spectator*

did a splendid work. It raised the conventional standards of conduct, and with such a society as that of Queen Anne's reign, no weapon could have been more effective in doing this than the irony of Addison.

Many numbers of the *Spectator* contain work by others than Addison, but, if the tone is the same, it is impossible not to perceive that in all literary respects Addison's work stands alone. Some fifty essays contain what is best and most characteristic in Addison: these are of perpetual charm. In their diction and language they are divinely clear, altogether apart from his position as an influence on public morality, Addison occupies a place in literature as a master of English prose. He has the eloquence of perfect lucidity, his sentences flow on with the ease of a gentle stream, never rushing into cataracts, but never becoming stagnant or meandering. If it is true that style is the reflection of the man, then Addison is one of the calmest and clearest of all writers. There is a feeling of great latent power in his natural sentences, a sense of easy mastery, of genial reserve, of harmonious self-control, lies in the serene movement of his thoughts, which inevitably brings to our mind the superiority, the urbanity, the sad good-humour of the man. The grace and polish of his diction is not the end of Addison's charm, the ease, the playfulness, the apt illustrations, the appropriateness of everything said, the good taste as regards what is not said, are equally pervading fragrances in the *Spectator's* charming garden.

4 Later work of Addison — The rest of Addison's life may be briefly told. The *Spectator* ended in 1712, but a new series was brought out in 1714, which Addison followed up with the *Freeholder*, a paper in the Whig interest, which was born and died in 1715. Little need be said of these, and almost

as little about the tragedy of *Cato*, which took the town by storm in 1713

Addison had not the warm heart and high vitality required by the successful dramatist. It need not surprise anyone that he chose the stately form of the Greek drama as the model for his dramatic effort. He had argued in one of the papers in the *Spectator* that the chaste form and the moral tone of the Greek tragedies might well be imitated by the English playwrights, who possessed so much greater skill in the construction of a plot. The result of the practical application of this argument was *Cato*, a tragedy based upon the rules of Aristotle, honoured by Voltaire above the plays of Shakespeare, but condemned by most English critics even in Addison's time. Yet the frigid piece had a tremendous success on the stage, where it appealed to the noisy patriotism of the audience. Men saw in Cato, as he foresaw the ruin of Rome, the prophet who was warning Englishmen against the treachery of treacherous conspirators against the Protestant throne. In spite, however, of its attempts at classic eloquence and in the stoic philosophy, *Cato* cannot now arouse even a lukewarm applause among the friends of Addison.

The literary work of Addison's last years was of negligible quality and quantity. As Secretary of State and as the husband of a Countess, he was involved in social and political life, and was no longer a spectator merely. But his proud shyness would not permit him to shine in this public work. He was a failure as a statesman, and died, some say as a consequence of a life of frivolous indulgence, in 1719, at the early age of forty-seven. Doubtless he drank wine, like his contemporaries, but it seems to us that the visit which Thackeray pays to him in *Esmond* shows us the real man. He is there grave, temperate, silent, almost morose, sarcastic, and good-humoured, suffering the impetuous and reeling Steele

with a sad patience, as though he would say, "What a fine fellow! But O that he should be capable of falling thus!" It was thus that he viewed humanity, rejoicing over the simple virtues and stately code of honour of Sir Roger, smiling pitifully over the paltriness and the pettiness which were everywhere

His moral code was simple In No 122 of the *Spectator* he says —

A man's first care should be to avoid the reproaches of his own heart, his next, to escape the censures of the world, if the last interferes with the former, it ought to be entirely neglected, but otherwise there cannot be a greater satisfaction to an honest mind, than to see those approbations which it gives itself seconded by the applauses of the public, a man is more sure of his conduct, when the verdict which he passes upon his own behaviour is thus warranted and confirmed by the opinion of all that know him

The fine lines written by his friend Thomas Tickell on the occasion of his funeral, show that this test of his conduct was fully passed by Addison. But on the other side, we have the immortal picture of Atticus in Pope's *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, the spiteful poet has affixed to Addison's name the innuendo of jealousy, though he cannot deny his genius

5 John Dennis — In contrast with the urbanity of Addison, we run across the vulgar rant of John Dennis (1657-1734), a critic whose early works contain much sound sense, but who fell on to hard times and became simply coarse and venomous. He described Pope as a hunch-backed toad, and the spiteful little poet never forgave him. Dennis thought himself referred to in the lines dedicated to Appius, in Pope's *Essay on Criticism* —

'Twere well might critics still this freedom take,
But Appius reddens at each word you speak,
And stares, tremendous, with a threat'ning eye,
Like some fierce Tyrant in old tapestry
Fear most to tax an honourable fool,
Whose right it is uncensur'd, to be dull

The result of this was a furious attack on the harmless poem, an attack which causes Dennis to occupy a large place in the *Dunciad* (see p 211), and inspired the following bitter couplet in the prologue to Pope's satires —

Yet then did Dennis rave in furious fret,
I never answer'd—I was not in debt

But Dennis, in spite of his choler and his poverty, is entitled to the honour of a momentary mention here for the sturdy and downright character of his earlier essays. He was not a dunce altogether

CHAPTER XI

Pope and Contemporary Poets

Pope met the Demands of the Day His Early Training The
Essay on Criticism The *Rape of the Lock* Elegiac
 Poems Homer The War on the Dunces The *Essay*
on Man The *Moral Essays* Satires and Epistles
 Pope's Genius Parnell Prior Gay

Alexander Pope (1688-1744)

1709 The *Essay on Criticism*
 1709-13 Pastorals
 1714 The *Rape of the Lock*
 1715-26 Translation of Homer
 1728 The *Dunciad*
 1731-38 Epistles and Satires
 1733 The *Essay on Man*
 1742 The *Dunciad* (final form)

Thomas Parnell (1679-1718)

c 1719 The *Hermes*, etc

Matthew Prior (1664-1721)

1718 Complete Poems

John Gay (1688-1732)

1714 The *Shepherd's Week*
 1728 The *Beggar's Opera*

1 Poetic taste of the day met by Pope — The
 journalists, along with Addison and Swift, represent
 their age completely on its social and political side
 The personification of the intellectual spirit of the
 time is the poet Alexander Pope We perceive in him
the apotheosis of cleverness and brilliance in verse.
 The minds of the men of the times of Queen Anne
 and George the First were jaded by their absorption
 in political and social intrigue In poetry they looked
 chiefly for a stimulant, but also for the spice of
 scandal and the polish of an artificial fashion They
 found what they wanted in Pope Alert and clever,
with a genius for satire and for polished perfection of

language, Pope set himself to indulge the popular demand. Never dull or pretentious, always bright and wide awake, he is the most witty of our poets, the most terse in epigram, the most combative in exposure of what was inexact or incorrect. The dunce was his *bête noir*; he was the apostle of all those arts which brighten the intellect, the artisan of literary glitter and of minutely perfect mental porcelain.

A fashion or convention had grown up in poetry. The poet was compelled to adapt himself to this fashion, or his works would have gone unheeded. Pope was not the man, like Milton, to mould an epic in a stoical and unregarded silence. Men wished to advertise themselves in the eighteenth century, and Pope was of all men the most eager to hear of his own fame. He therefore adapted himself to the prevalent desires. And this was the more easy for him, because his genius was exactly fitted to the environment which gave it birth. Dryden was his forerunner, in whom he found the weapons which it was his literary mission to bring to perfection. We have learnt how Dryden had honoured by imitation the great French dramatists, and had sought to establish the heroic couplet as the standard metre in English verse. In this he failed, but, when we turn to his satires, we see that in that department he has brilliantly succeeded. The heroic couplet is an unequalled vehicle for satire, and Pope took it up where Dryden had left it, perfected it by sharpening and condensing, until it rang and re-echoed like a gun report, and shook the most stupid senses with an admiration for its cleverness. To write the heroic couplet, became the one correct thing to do in verse. The classic style in English meant the sharp and perfect heroic couplet.

This strenuous endeavour on the part of Pope for perfectness of form, for brilliancy of workmanship,

was made in answer to the demands of his readers, and was no bad thing in itself. But very illogically this quality was made to imply the absence of the other qualities which go far towards transmuting good verse into poetry. A clever and critical class, paying great attention to an artificial literary code, naturally sneers at everything which is outside its own circle of ideas. Pope shared with his readers, with men like Swift and Walpole also, an absolute scorn of all enthusiasm, and of excess in any form. Nothing romantic, nothing mystical, had a home in the minds of Pope and his contemporaries. The age tolerated no exaltations, no despairs, the chill winds of common-sense froze out all dreamlands, all heroisms, and all flights from the prosaic earth-level. Common-sense was enthroned as the twin monarch with correct style, as the guiding hands for the poet. And the final result was not good poetry, but only splendid rhetoric. No more perfect verses than Pope's have ever been written in English, but they are the work of only a third-rate poet who severely imprisoned his imagination, denying it all vision of the heavens and of the fairy realms which are the home of true inspiration. Pope devoted himself assiduously to the perfection of the weapon without understanding the true equipment of the man who was to wield it. The fate of Pope's fame is a warning to those who would put form above matter, as well as to those who seek merely to represent in all things the tastes, the manners, and the conventions of a day which had a yesterday and must have also a to-morrow.

2 Pope's Early Training — The early life of Pope did not suggest his future position as the first great literary dictator who was readily acknowledged to be the supreme writer of his generation. Fortune favoured him with his great talents only, in other respects she was unkind. Born of Roman Catholic parents in the year of his religion's final eclipse in

England, he was also sickly and deformed from childhood. His father was only a London merchant with no social advantages, who found it necessary to live in the country, away from the centre of politics, which was intolerant to no one so much as to one of his faith. He lived in a delightful spot a few miles west of Windsor, but the beauties of nature seem never to have attracted the son whom London was to make famous. The childhood of the future poet was spent under a mixture of happy and unhappy conditions. To the fortunate influences of nature he was not responsive, but he readily assimilated to himself the habits of secrecy and intrigue which the faith of his father made necessary. He was throughout his life fond of mystification and double-dealing, and did not shy at absolute lying and fabrication when it seemed agreeable to his vanity. For Pope was a spoilt child. From his earliest years his cleverness attracted attention, amazed and stupefied his friends. Add to this the fact that he was a half-invalid, doomed to be denied the sports and frolics of normal boyhood, and the fretful self-consciousness and morbid vanity of his later years can readily be accounted for. His one passion was for literary fame, and woe betide the unfortunate scribbler who wrote a word to threaten that.

Unable to go to a public school, he was compelled to undergo the disadvantages of an irregular education, we may fairly say, in fact, that he educated himself. He read a great deal of English poetry, admiring Spenser and Dryden above all others. He read also much Latin and rather less Greek, read French and Italian more or less imperfectly. He dabbled in philosophy and science, but never became master of either. He suffered from the weaknesses of a method of study which allowed him only to work at the things he liked for the moment, to shun the drudgery required for exact knowledge, and to scorn

the strenuous self-sacrifices of the scholar. He toiled hard only at the art of verse-making. The result was that he developed a wonderfully quick but superficial mind. We shall see how cleverly he could put into verse the philosophy of Bolingbroke, and make his rhetoric ring like the genuine article. We shall see how skilfully, with a very small knowledge of Greek, he translated Homer. He was so quick to comprehend the appearance of things, that he never sought for the real substance. He put the respectable and scholarly Theobald on to the dunce's throne, but Theobald's edition of Shakespeare is a work of solid value, while Pope's is rather a series of brilliant fireworks generously mingled with damp squibs. This is the character of the man, brilliance and cleverness attract him, dulness and solidity are his mortal foes.

He determined to be a poet, and worked very hard to make himself a great one. As a boy, he wrote verses with extraordinary ease. He "lisp'd in numbers, for the numbers came." At fifteen he was planning an epic poem. He translated favourite passages from Virgil, Homer, and other classical authors, and the precocious work was exceptionally meritorious. Encouraged by his father and by his small circle of Catholic intimates and worshippers, he went from strength to strength. In London he was brought to the notice of an influential critic, named Walsh, and became the friend of the old rake and dramatist, Wycherley. The gay and lively life of the town suited his disposition, if not his health. Letters of this time show that it was his conceit to affect the manners, the scandalous and loose conversation of the man about town. The type of wit which was patronised by Congreve and Wycherley was fashionable still, and Pope was nothing if not fashionable. He aspired to the society of the so-called "wits," the clubmen who set the standards

of taste and good-breeding. His Catholicism was no obstacle to him, because he did not allow it to become obtrusive. In religion and in politics he was indifferent, the toleration of the time, cynical and careless, was in the atmosphere, and he could not but breathe it.

3 *The Essay on Criticism* (1709)—He was not twenty-one when, in 1709, he completed his first poem of serious importance. This was the *Essay on Criticism*, a very remarkable production for a man of his years. He waited two years, carefully pruning and polishing his work, before giving it to the public. Then grave men like Addison were taken by storm. They saw in the new author the heir of Dryden, they found in him a poet whose first care had been to show that he understood the fundamental conditions of his art, they acclaimed his work as a masterpiece. Hitherto English poets had been compelled to rely upon Aristotle, Horace, or Boileau for the rules of their art. Now they had their own mentor, their own lawgiver, and he was a mere youth of twenty!

A study in the theory of judgment and criticism would need, we should have thought, the wisdom and experience of a mature mind, of a mind well-trained in scholarship and well-read in all the great literature of the world. Yet we find Pope imposing on the world his youthful ideas, and deceiving the elect and correct wits of London into accepting him as their poetic guide. It was impossible that the *Essay* could contain much that was either original or novel. And in truth it does not. To us it seems most banefully commonplace, and where it deals with doubtful points, it seems to us wholly wrong. But the couplets are often very felicitous, and Pope has at least the merit—a very common one with him—of dressing up old or familiar truths in a fresh and

effective way Few people now read the *Essay on Criticism* as a whole, but we all know that

A little learning is a dangerous thing,
and that

To err is human, to forgive, divine
We may know also that

Blunt truths more mischief than nice falsehoods do,
and some know that

Fools rush in where angels fear to tread
These are but examples of a faculty which is characteristically Pope's, and which he had thus early begun to unfold

The argument of the whole piece can be summarised readily in a few sentences. Though criticism is a natural faculty of mankind, yet it needs to be regulated by rules. These rules must be based on nature, and discovered by a study of those great poets who have gone before us. The rules which scholars have framed are not merely arbitrary, they "are Nature still, but Nature methodised." But though a poet must attend to the rules, Pope admits that there are "nameless graces which no methods teach." Yet he is loth to admit irregularities, the critic must think of the irregularities of Homer rather as stratagems to deceive the reader than as errors of the poet—

Nor is it Homer nods, but we that dream
There must be, in short, a science in poetry, and it is the critic's mission to teach "vain wits" this science, to make them

Admire superior sense, and doubt their own

Pope next discusses the causes of the critic's incorrect judgments. First, there is pride—the pride of superficial learning, which knows not the labours

of the mountain-way to artistic perfection Then there is the lack of sympathy with the work criticised, and the consequent tendency to condemn the whole for the imperfection of the parts Then there are critics who think of nothing but Wit and Fancy for these

True Wit is Nature to advantage dress'd,
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd

And others turn all their attention to the language,

And value books, as women men, for Dress,

while still others prize a poet's song for the smoothness and harmony of his numbers To all these the obvious counsel is "Avoid extremes," put aside prejudices, be honest and human Study the great critics of the past, study the "great Stagrite," Horace, Quintilian, Longinus, Erasmus, and our own Roscommon and Walsh

4 *The Rape of the Lock* (1714) — We are inclined to think highly of Pope's method when we come face to face with his next important poem, *the Rape of the Lock*, which appeared in its first form in 1712, and was enlarged to its final condition two years later This is one of the most brilliant trifles in our own or any literature, a graceful piece of pleasantry which gives almost as much delight now as it gave in 1712 Its occasion was a society quarrel which had arisen between two well-known Catholic families Lord Petre had stolen a curl from the hair of Miss Arabella Fermor, and the lady and her friends had taken it seriously to heart In order to allay the ill-feeling, Pope, at the suggestion of a friend, undertook to laugh it away with a mock-heroic account of the circumstances He was so successful in his first attempt that, in opposition to the advice of Addison, he made it into a more elaborate poem, which is the *Rape of the Lock* that we know

The poem is written in a high-flown epic style, and was intended to be a burlesque of a class of poems which have had their day and ceased to be. There was a mania among the inferior poets of the day for writing ponderous epics, surcharged with all the machinery of the Homeric gods and goddesses, and Pope adopted the method of these monstrosities and adapted it to the trifling episode of the loss of Miss Fermor's hair. In doing this, he was giving way to his love of ridicule and applying it to no ill cause, at the same time, he was making himself popular in the London drawing-rooms as the poet of society. His place among the members of the literary cliques became no less sure than his welcome in all cultivated society. From his point of view, therefore, the *Rape of the Lock* was well worth the trouble it cost him.

This trouble must have been considerable, for no burlesque more brilliantly clever adorns our literature. The language is always happy, witty, and lively. The tone of the sham epic is admirably sustained. The irony, the sly satire, the playful humour, the unforced raillery, are delightful. The spirit of the whole thing does not flag from the first line to the last. Yet it is surprising that such a poem could have given unbroken pleasure to its lady-readers. There is, as it seems to us, but a very thin disguise upon the poet's scorn. Even on such an occasion as this, Pope could not be *merely* good-humoured. He could not laugh without bitterness, nor smile without sarcasm. If Miss Fermor was delighted with the portrait of Belinda, she must have been strangely stupid. Even in the letter to her, by which Pope introduced his poem, the underlying contempt for the female sex is not difficult to see, and it would hardly be unfair to describe the whole as a satire on the female sex, so skilfully done as to have deceived Pope's women-readers completely. A portion of the very great pains which Pope gave to the preparation of the

poem must have been spent in refining the edges of the satire, and in neutralising the acidity of his laughter

The supernatural machinery of the poem is one of its most agreeable features. It is taken from the jargon of the Rosicrucians, an account of whom, Pope tells Miss Feimor in his preface, is to be found in a certain French treatise, which "in its title and size is so like a Novel, that many of the fair sex have read it for one by mistake." The sylphs or air-spirits, the gnomes or earth-demons, the nymphs and salamanders, attend the lady Belinda throughout, and one airy spirit, Ariel, is borrowed from Shakespeare to be her special guardian. They play the part of the gods and goddesses in the epic poems. It is a sylph, for instance, who befriends Belinda, and warns her against her enemy, man. It is the gnomes who at the finish direct the grains of snuff which give Belinda the victory over her enemy. The supernatural beings here play their last active part in English poetry. The use of fairies and other external agents in the management of human actions was effectually ended by the *Rape of the Lock*.

— We shall not analyse the poem in detail here. It is one of the brightest and wittiest poems in literature. By means of it, Pope restored peace to the injured family, and at the same time wrote his lightest and most genial work. It may be right to perceive the intent of satire beneath the laughter, it may be right to see in it Pope's offensive scorn of the fair sex, but it would be emphatically wrong to make these into reasons for not enjoying the poem. As a burlesque upon a class of absurdly pretentious "poems," it is excellent, as a lively word-play upon certain society-follies, which arise from a too large respect being paid to worthless trifles, it is also excellent, as a piece of brilliantly witty persiflage, it is unsurpassed. In the broad sense, it cannot be

called humorous, the intellectual rather than the simply human element is too dominant for that. But it is a piece of real fun, an exquisite trifle, a rain of clever verses. Never elsewhere does Pope charm the poetic faculty so well as he does here.

We can but record here the fact that Pope had made a few early studies in pastoral poetry in *Windsor Forest* with some success. From his own point of view, however, these were not so successful as the two elegiac poems which he wrote some time before 1717. The *Elegy on an Unfortunate Lady* strikes a more pathetic note than any other of his poems, but, for all that, it is but a fictitious grief, which the poet never felt. In *Eloisa to Abelard*, we have a kindred exercise in artificial passion, full of rhetorical fervour and eloquent sentiment, but never touching the heart. Such a story as that of the two lovers who were sundered, first by misfortune and then by their religious vows, could have no direct appeal to Pope's own sympathies, but it gave a good opportunity for the exercise of his cleverness in adapting his poetic powers to any subject. Eloisa had been an abbess for many years, a letter of her lost lover's fell into her hands, and a history of their disastrous love was contained therein. Then love fought again with religion, human nature again wrestled against her spiritual calm, the terrible coldness of her ascetic life hissed in contact with the warm memories of the world in which she had known Abelard's love. Religion only won its victory through torture and agony: it is this struggle which Pope has sought to picture in words. And undoubtedly he has found the fitting words. But they are not words which burn. There is not, as there is in Rousseau's *La Nouvelle Héloïse*, the tremble of a personal experience, the vibrant sympathy, the ecstasy and rapture which only the religious soul knows. Pope could not lead us into moods of

spiritual conflict he is satisfied if he can compel us to admire his verses We ask for bread, and he gives us a diamond Thus, to the spirit of Abelard, Eloisa thus speaks —

While prostrate here in humble grief I lie,
Kind, virtuous drops just gath'ring in my eye,
While praying, trembling, in the dust I roll,
And dawning grace is op'ning on my soul
Come, if thou dar'st, all-charming as thou art !
Oppose thyself to heav'n , dispute my heart ,
Come, with one glance of those deluding eyes
Blot out each bright idea of the skies ,
Take back that grace, those sorrows, and those tears ,
Take back my fruitless penitence and pray'rs ,
Snatch me, just mounting, from the blest abode ,
Assist the fiends, and tear me from my God !

Who could mistake this for real passion? Yet, under Pope's theory of poetic art, these two elegies must be accounted almost perfect It is, according to him, the function of Art to methodise Nature, and here that task has been very well performed But, interpretation and insight are far more even than order and skill A voice is required which could sing the melodies and chant the anguish of Eloisa's heart, not a word-machine to manufacture a dialect suited to her grief And Pope was not a voice, but a brain

5th Translation of Homer (1715-26) — At the age of twenty-five, Pope was acknowledged as the first poet of the day, and succeeded thus early to Dryden's throne. This brought him the friendship of many of the notable men of the time, of whom Swift was the most pushful in his admiration So when it occurred to Pope to translate Homer, Swift caught up the project with enthusiasm, and canvassed his powerful friends, Harley, St John, and the Tory clique, in favour of his new acquaintance The result was that Pope was assured of success before he

commenced his work. The largest subscription-list hitherto known backed him in his task, and, when the first volume appeared in 1715, its sale was so great that it made Pope's financial position so secure that he could be henceforth quite independent of the favours of any one. The six volumes of the *Iliad* took five years to complete, and Pope, during those years, received the unprecedented sum of £5500 for this work alone.

The success of the Homer, great as it was, was on the whole well-deserved by its merits as a book. If, forgetting the fact that it is a translation, we sit down and read Pope's *Iliad* from end to end, we shall be free to confess that we have been admirably entertained by a vigorous and well-written narrative, which rarely flags in interest and spirit, and which is full of clear, if generally cold, descriptions, and of always excellent rhetoric. It is a good tale, not so rushing nor so Homeric as Chapman's, but possessing that quality of the *Iliad* which makes it still one of the most exciting narratives in the world's literature. Considered, therefore, as a vigorous story told with clearness and dignity, Pope's *Iliad* deserves all the good words that have been spoken of it. But, Bentley, the greatest contemporary Greek scholar, in a perfectly friendly way, is said to have criticised it to Pope in a way which seems to be final. "A pretty poem, Mr. Pope," he said, "but you must not call it Homer." And in fact we are never, except by the names, reminded of Homer throughout the whole of the "pretty poem."

For translating Homer, in truth, Pope had as few qualifications as any man who could read Greek at all. To begin with, he was no scholar. He did not read Greek easily, he did not know the genius of the language, he knew nothing of the significance of the very many allusions to local customs, to ancient beliefs, to the large pantheon of Homer's

gods and goddesses. Moreover, he was disqualified by the fact that he was the representative type of the most artificial, the most narrowly cultured, epoch in our history. Homer was essentially a creature of the open air, a wanderer by river-sides, an observer and a lover of sunrises and sunsets, above all, the incarnation of hand-to-hand conflict. Pope was in himself the "vile antithesis" to all this. He was a wit, a creature of words, immured in drawing-rooms and clubs, keen in the warfare of the tongue, a lover of artificial grottos and an observer of human weaknesses, instead of natural beauties. What more need be said to condemn Pope as the interpreter of Homer? Pope, the fastidious man of fashion, the delicate hot-house lily, was of all men the least sympathetic to the rude, unconventional, hardy plant, which has survived the shocks of nearly thirty centuries.

The truth is, that we must not consider Pope's Homer as a translation, although it is not an abject failure in that respect. It is rather the epic of the early eighteenth century. It remains to tell us what the world of George the First's time thought worthy to be called an epic poem. No age was more conscious of its intellectual power and greatness than this. It needed a worthy expression of its greatness. And the epic which was to give this expression need not be an original one. For the spirit of the age was intellectual, readers and thinkers would not have appreciated the religious mood embodied in *Paradise Lost*, which poem Addison was one of the first tentatively to appraise, nor would the patriotic exaltation of the *Faerie Queene* have suited it better. Too sceptical for Milton's earnest faith, too cold and too critical for Spenser's romantic enthusiasm, the age nevertheless called for some great work, some piece of good writing of epic stature and dignity. And it was in Pope's Homer that this was found.

That poem did not please the scholar, but it was delightful to the wit, it gave the cultured clubman a long poem, clothed throughout with the classic style which he deemed the acme of perfection in literary art. In its own way it is almost perfect, but that way is not Homer's: it is that of the cultured circles of 1715. In reading Pope's Homer, therefore, we must take our eyes away from the Greek original. Chapman is far more Greek than Pope, though his verses cannot be compared with Pope's. We are in contact with an eighteenth-century poem, bright, clear, often vivid, full of fine rhetorical speeches and descriptions, but without the warm blood of heroic combat, without the naive simplicity of primitive ages, without the leap of torrents and the glare of setting suns. Pope's imagination, his knowledge of the essential and the permanent in human nature, was not equal to Homer, yet his *Iliad* is a remarkably fine poem, and is, at all events, the worthiest poetic work of the time.

From the *Iliad*, Pope passed to the *Odyssey*. But he was tired of his task by this time, and, in order to get it finished, he called to his aid two young University men, named Fenton and Broome, who showed some skill in versifying. These men he paid for their trouble at the rate of about £50 for each book, a very small share of the total profits, although it must not be forgotten, in charging Pope with want of generosity, that it was his name which gave the poem its sale. However this may be, it was certainly not right to the public to impose on it as his own hundreds of lines which were written by other men. It was difficult for the public to separate Pope's lines from Broome's, and it is difficult for a modern critic to do so. There is a general feeling in the mind that the *Odyssey* is inferior to the *Iliad*, but that applies to the parts which Pope did, as well as to the other parts. The facile way in which

the trick of Pope's style was caught by the two young translators is an interesting fact, and seems to suggest that the classic manner of the eighteenth century was not a matter of genius, but an affair of careful cultivation. Pope's *Odyssey*, at any rate, does not arouse our enthusiasm, nor does it compare at all favourably with the *Iliad* the fragrance of the original is more subtle and evanescent, its atmosphere too delicate and too rare, for the polish of Pope, which demands a more solid basis.

6 War against the Dunces *The Dunciad* (1728) — Passing over a perfunctory edition of Shakespeare which was brought out in 1725, and was deservedly a failure, we come into the period of the great satires, which form the third string in the bow of Pope's fame. Since 1718, he had been living comfortably at Twickenham, in the neighbourhood of Bolingbroke, Lord Burlington, Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, and other friends. There he entertained his few chosen companions, and was visited by Swift in 1726 and 1727. This visit was no doubt flavoured with much talk and discussion concerning the great attack upon the littleness of human nature which Swift had just launched in *Gulliver's Travels*, and which Pope was to support very shortly with the *Dunciad*. The two great antagonists of dulness had in common a sense of personal superiority, an almost babyish vanity, a virulent spleen, and a terribly venomous tongue. But it is doubtful whether the splendid sincerity of the disappointed dean was ever characteristic of Pope. At Twickenham he might have been happy and comfortable. He was flattered by his friends, and feared by his foes. He had the means to indulge his favourite habits, and in his landscape garden and the famous grotto he had generously cherished his pet hobbies. Yet he was in a constant shiver of irritation, was wounded by the least word of opposition or criticism, and fretted his miserable

body into unnecessary pains and agonies. Less and less did he become capable of straightforward and really manly conduct. It is pitiful that a man with Pope's title to greatness should have descended to such petty deceptions and mean equivocations as Pope's correspondence shows him to have indulged in as a commonplace and usual thing. A great satirist of human vices might have drawn the line at manipulating his own letters and telling outrageous lies about his own life. But it seems right to say at once and at first, in relation to Pope's satiric writings, that his attack had not the large range of *Gulliver's Travels*, that it was not comprehensive, but personal and individual, that it needed the goad of a special object, who had, by some trifling defect in his behaviour to himself, irritated the poet into his vindictive vengeance.

This is particularly true of the *Dunciad*, the epic of the dunces, the first part of which was published in 1728. It is modelled upon Dryden's *MacFlecknoe*, but is an altogether bigger thing than that little brilliant. In the savage joy with which Pope hurls his venom and his filth at his victims, the hand of his inspirer, Swift, may surely be traced, his lash is perfectly merciless and unsparing, the miserable retinue of the King of the Dunces grovels in the mire, and their tormentor only laughs and tortures them the more. But, although we cannot laugh so loudly or so hilariously as he, the zest of the *Dunciad* cannot be resisted entirely. In mere spite there is, of course, little fun, but, if we do not care anything about the individuals, and are content to receive the satire in a general sense, we shall be ready to confess that the *Dunciad* has many passages which are worthy of its theme, and that the poet's object on the whole was a good one. The Grub Street hack was partly to be pitied, the pedantic half-scholar was not always and solely to be blamed, yet, they

stand for human types which are a permanent clog upon culture the hireling scribbler, who will pen any trash for a guinea, and the self-satisfied Dr Dryasdust, whose eye is so intent upon the commas that he loses sight of the book, are each in his own way the enemy of the apostles of light. Pope thought himself no less than one of these. Clear thinking and clear writing on all intellectual matters were his avenues to the best culture. They do not lead us so far as he thought, but he must not be blamed for endeavouring to do as much as he did, and to clear away the impediments in the way. His spiteful nature enjoyed the task, and gave the flavour to the *Dunciad*. But it did not make that poem a mere unneedful exercise.

Viewed in this light, the *Dunciad* has clearly a definite and not ignoble purpose. Further, the plan of the poem is exceedingly well conceived. Under the auspices of the goddess of dulness, a new king is appointed to fill the throne of the dunces' empire. With elaborate ceremonies and initiations, Theobald is enthroned, though in the later edition of 1742, Theobald was replaced by an enemy whose wound was more recent—the versatile and witty Colley Cibber. The public proclamation of the king is attended by sacrifices (the fire being made of the enormous pile of his unsuccessful works), by various games and contests, which are so dull as to cause all the spectators to fall asleep. Then the goddess carries the king to her temple, and he, falling asleep with his head on her knees, has many visions, and sees how Great Britain is to be brought into his empire. The progress of this revolution gives Pope his many opportunities of dealing dexterous blows to his foes. It ends in the total ruin of all order, a memorable passage describes the final triumph of Chaos and Night, and closes the poem.

7. *The Essay on Man* (1733).—Fortunately, the

Dunciad does not contain Pope's best work in satire. This is contained in the *Moral Essays* and in the *Imitations of Horace*, published at various times from 1731 to the year of Pope's death. The *Moral Essays* were intended to form, along with the *Essay on Man* (1733), portions of a large epic dealing with the nature of man as a whole. It is not certain that Pope conceived such a large undertaking, but he certainly adopted the idea of his work which this implies, when his friend Warburton explained it to him. But, as they stand, the poems are both fragmentary and superficial. Pope's cleverness never waned: these later verses are as brilliant in shining epigram, as rich in fine rhetoric, as any of their predecessors. They are, if anything, more polished (but without being more radiant), and the couplets are so carefully wrought that they seem to fly like a series of scintillating sparks from an anvil, rather than to form the gleam of a continuous argument. These essays and satires are far more a disconnected set of moral reflections magnificently moulded than carefully evolved moral disquisitions. They have the air of having been done piecemeal, and trimmed again and again, without much regard for the articulation of the angles. This is of course the inevitable Nemesis of the couplet, it is unsociable, and tends to isolate itself. But on the other hand, this perfect isolation has made the couplets in Pope's *Essays* and *Satires* the most quotable verses in English except Shakespeare's.

Though not the first written, the *Essay on Man* is the centre-piece of this group of poems, and it must be treated first. It is Pope's most ambitious poem, in it he attempts no less a task than that of showing the true position of man in the universe. It is, in its way, the religious poem of its time. The foundation of *Paradise Lost*, the faith unquestioned and absolute in the truth of the Christian revelation,

was not possible to the clever and rational minds of the eighteenth century. There were deists, like Tindal and Toland, who denied the possibility of a revealed religion at all, there were others who believed in a vague deity of some kind, but did not believe in the divinity of Christ, and there were no cultured minds, not even among the clergy, who did not regard their faith as something to be intellectually proved rather than simply received on trust. It was among this last class that Pope found his readers. Religious men were theologians, and not saints, they loved argument in preference to mystical meditations. Pope endeavoured to satisfy them, to vindicate for the satisfaction of such the ways of God to man. But if the *Essay on Man* was meant to defeat the deists and to give support to revealed religion, it was a sad failure, and it is very doubtful whether Pope cared to do anything of the kind. His arguments are deistic throughout, and do little more for Christianity than they do for Con- fucianism.

Pope was, in truth, no philosopher at best he was a clear expounder of the ideas of other men. And here he relied implicitly upon the thoughts of the cynical and shallow Bolingbroke. That unsuccessful adventurer returned from banishment and lived near Pope, at Twickenham. Pope and he were often in discussion together, and Pope would pick up the droppings of his conversation and versify them while they were fresh. But Bolingbroke himself was but a second-rate and, for the most part, second-hand philosopher. What was to be expected, then, from the most brilliant reflection of his philosophy? It is said that Bolingbroke found the arguments for Pope; and, certainly, the nature-deism, the advice to "look from Nature up to Nature's God," which is so prominent in the poem, is no less prominent in Bolingbroke's scheme. But

it is difficult to eliminate from the poem any abiding or unifying idea. It was pleasing to the heterodox and to many of the orthodox at once. Its teaching would seem to be a mixture of elementary pantheism and sheer fatalism. "Whatever is, is right," is a cold answer to the man who is oppressed by the terrible problem of causeless evil and triumphant wrong. "Presume not God to scan," is but cowardly advice in the eyes alike of the mystic and the inquirer. Throughout we find the main philosophy of the poem superficial and incomplete, Pope had not read sufficiently, nor thought sufficiently, nor could he, with his poor equipment of sound knowledge, succeed in unifying the universe when Spinoza and Leibnitz had failed. He tried to solve by intellectual means a problem not purely intellectual. The result is a series of brilliant couplets, as unphilosophical as they are unmistakably clever. Assertions are crowded into the lines without proof, many of them contradicting those which went before. But they are often so very well expressed that they remain in the memory forever.

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee,
 All Chance, Direction, which thou can'st not see,
 All Discord, Harmony not understood,
 All partial Evil, universal Good,
 And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,
 One truth is clear: **WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT**

How does he know these things? Of course by employing his reason upon the phenomena of the universe. But the main argument of the first epistle, which is concluded by the above quotation, is that it is presumptuous for man, with his limited powers and from his humble place on the insignificant earth, to form judgments about the whole universe from the little that he can know. How, then, can he justify from his own principles the sweeping conclusions of

this and many other passages? The *Essay on Man* is always great rhetoric, but never great philosophy

8 *Satires and Imitations of Horace* (1731-38) — The same is true of the satires, which form the fitting climax to our account of Pope. For it is in them that we find his best and most effective work. The unity which we rightly demand in the *Essay on Man* is not essential in a series of commentaries upon the poet's observations of life, and the felicity of epigram so apparent in every page gives exactly the flavour demanded by the occasional satire. Nothing could have been more suited to Pope's genius than the attempt to imitate Horace. True, Pope was much more acid in his attitude towards mankind than was the urbane and genial Roman poet, but he had the same pretensions to the lordship of good taste and good sense, the same kind of keen observation of the ordinary doings of men, the same *curiosa felicitas* in expression, the same devotion to his art as such. Among the wits of Pope's day there was a keen desire to set up the Georgian age as the Augustan age of English culture, an influential patron like Bolingbroke or Burlington liked to pose as Mæcenas, and, though neither George the Second nor his minister Walpole could aspire to the literary position of Augustus, the leading writers strove to overcome this deficiency, and to atone for the shortcomings of their rulers by their own supremacy in culture and in cleverness. An Augustan age without its Horace was, however, like *Hamlet* with the Prince of Denmark omitted, and Pope, by his talent as a witty observer of the weak aspects of contemporary manners, filled the breach to the entire satisfaction of all his readers. It is true that Pope was not always animated by the pure love of virtue, it is true that he never spoke with a voice sweeter or more influential than that of the man of the world, it is true that no emotion except that of spite gave warmth and life

to his moral discourses. But he has struck home with a force that Horace never surpassed, and has condensed his criticism into sentences of scathing and often annihilating intensity.

The five *Moral Essays* are in reality but amplifications of certain parts of the *Essay on Man*. They are frequently bitter, but, in comparison with the biting and brilliant satires, they are mild and orthodox. It is in these satires that the poet, in freely translating Horace, has at the end of his life reached the acme of his talents. We see here how far the purely clever and merely witty writer could go, for these satires represent the best work of their kind that has been done in English. Pope identified himself with Horace in the first of the epistles

To virtue only and her friends a friend

He declares that he is all for virtue, that he will not spare a man because he is great, that he will be no statesman's spy, and will do nothing to gild a knave or flatter a fool. So long as he brings vice to light he cares not

Yes, while I live, no rich or noble knave
Shall walk the world, in credit, to his grave

Very well, and perhaps true if the "noble knave" had happened to be a dunce falling athwart Pope's personal vengeance. But we do not forget how in the *Dunciad* he has pilloried Defoe, and blackened the character of Whitefield, and the portrait of Horace must be declared too flattering for Pope.

Later comes a portrait of Bolingbroke in the ill-fitting robes of Mæcenas, and still later we have Horace's Epistle to Augustus. This last is one of Pope's best compositions, the idea of addressing George the Second and Walpole in the language which Horace suitably addressed to Augustus is in itself a piece of exquisite irony, and the satire is none the

less agreeable, because it is a little more subtle and more refined than usual. This epistle, too, contains a critical view of the state of contemporary poetry and drama, which makes it valuable. The comments are entertaining and acute, though it is curious to find that Pope complains of the undue regard shown by his age for the older poets: no romantic revival had yet begun.

But the most brilliant, certainly the best known, of Pope's satires is the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*, which forms their prologue. It is the poet's justification of his own life and occupation, addressed to one of the most respected among the literary men of the day. It is a reply to his detractors, an attempt to crush them forever, it is the *Dunciad* condensed. Flashes of poetry, of destroying rhetoric, of intolerable wit, noble outbursts of genuine indignation, scathing streams of scorn, portraits cleanly and mercilessly drawn: all that is greatest of Pope is focussed here. Atticus, Bufo and Sporus live for us in Pope's pictures, and even Addison will be more sure of immortality for his little enemy's caricature. We have no space to quote an adequate amount of this poem: it must be read and become familiar to all who would understand Pope. The poet of polished society, the poet of the drawing-room, the poet whose work is the conversation and gossip of witty men and women, refined, condensed, and polished to the finest degree: it is he whom we meet in the prologue, and in that almost equally brilliant dialogue which forms the epilogue of the satires, and which was published under the title of "1738" in that year. Violent and bitter they both are, but there is something of the angry roar of a real storm in these, something of dignified calm in the reposeful passage on resignation with which the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot* closes.

Only a portion of the *Dunciad* now remained for

Pope to do His last six years of life were spent in the arrangement of new editions of his poems, in steering himself through a labyrinth of quarrels, and in mystifying all those who try to extract the truth from his correspondence. He died peacefully in 1744, leaving behind him an inheritance of bad feeling for his friends to squabble about among themselves. More important for us is it to notice that, whatever men thought of him personally, those who aspired to be poets did so by imitating him. He set the poetic fashion for his own and for the next generation. Hundreds of exercises in the heroic couplet which he laid down as the "correct" metre were performed during the rest of the century, but no writers except Johnson and Goldsmith have left us anything worthy to compare with Pope's poems. When one hears it said that the scribbling of heroic couplets is a mere mechanic art, we must remember how few of Pope's imitators have left us memorable work in that form. There is the indefinable aroma of genius in his endless stream of sharp, ringing couplets, they often become true poetry. It is not poetry of the highest kind. Pope was disqualified from that by his temperament and by his environment. He was rather an artisan than an artist. But, in spite of his physical and social drawbacks, in spite of bad health and bad temper, he did the work he set himself to do supremely well. He taught the high value of style in all art, he dignified the manner if he did not elevate the matter of literature. Scornful of his personal character we may be, but never contemptuous of the great intellectual sway which he wielded—on the whole, so much to the advantage of our poetry. We may pity the man and patronise the poet, but we must respect the accomplished workman in verse, the dominant personality in the intellectual life of the early eighteenth century.

9 Thomas Parnell — One poet only among Pope's contemporaries had any sort of pretensions to rivalry with him. This was the shy and almost unknown **Thomas Parnell (1679-1718)**, who became somehow acquainted with Pope while occupying a small Ulster parsonage, and who was encouraged to write poetry by Pope and Swift. Trying to write light poems and satires, he failed abjectly, his mood was grave, almost melancholy, and his fame rests on the *Hermit*, a poem which Mr Edmund Gosse describes as "the apex and *chef d'œuvre* of Augustan poetry in England." Without going so far as that, we may assuredly agree that, as a moral tale, in which action, description, and reflection are admirably balanced, the *Hermit* would be hard to surpass. It is in heroic couplets which have not become enslaved to the manner of Pope, it makes us feel that Parnell would probably have become a more enduring poet than Pope, had he not lived so far away from London and died young. As it is, he is but a minor poet, in spite of the fact that he had a distinctly original vein, and that in the *Hymn to Contentment* he struck a new lyric note.

Minor Poets — Merely to mention **Ambrose Philips (1671-1749)**, who had a long discussion with Pope about the merits of their rival pastorals, would be sufficient, even if his odes were much better than they are. And **Thomas Tickell (1686-1740)** can expect no further consideration, in spite of his noble lines on the death of Addison, and of the translation of Homer's *Iliad*, which threatened to rival Pope's, and which, being patronised by Addison, led to Pope's lines on Atticus in the *Epistle to Dr Arbuthnot*. **Sir Samuel Garth (1660-1718)**, a cultured doctor, versified a topical medical quarrel in *The Dispensary* (1699), which is in Pope's manner, but cannot be accounted poetry nowadays. Other men are no more than names which stand for men of

respectable talent, of some culture and literary ambition, but with no poetic powers and no share of Pope's cleverness

10 **Prior** —The poetry of **Matthew Prior** (1664-1721), however, has a sufficiently strong idiosyncrasy to call for more respectful treatment. Prior's was a remarkable career. From the humblest circumstances he rose, by way of Westminster School and St John's, Cambridge, into high political positions, and reached his highest point of influence when he was British plenipotentiary at Paris in 1713, charged with the negotiations for the Treaty of Utrecht. He came to grief at the hands of the Whigs later on, but in 1718 his volume of poems attracted all the leading lights of the society of the time, and brought him the large profit of £4000.

It is in light vers d'occasion, in epigrams, and in slightly cynical odes in the style of Horace, that Prior rises somewhere near to greatness. He has the airy carelessness, the gay irresponsibility, the easy wit, required to adorn a trifling theme with suitably trifling ornament. He is graceful, happy, inevitable, in his choice of expression, and has made literature out of such verses as men scribble on the corners of envelopes or in 'ladies' albums. He has improvised brilliant poems, which have the quality of gossamer, and cannot be fixed on to anything substantial. They have no depth, no spiritual or lyric tone, only a nameless prettiness, a charming bonhomie, which suggests the delightful companion that Prior must have been. The lines "To a Child of Quality," the ode beginning "The merchant, to secure his treasure," and the "Better Answer," have a charm which we cannot define, and which was evidently the same charm as led to Prior's own success in life.

Prior did not, however, rest his own fame upon these odds and ends of verse. He hoped to be remembered as the author of the epic, *Solomon*. All

we can think about this ponderous performance now is that Prior is a mysterious personage. The man who wrote the following epigram might have laughed in his sleeve if he had thought of the fate of *Solomon*, scorned, oppressed by the heaviest of heavy hands

Yes, every poet is a fool,
By demonstration Ned can show it
Happy, could Ned's inverted rule
Prove every fool to be a poet

The gift of self-criticism would have saved Prior from wasting his energies on *Solomon*, it would have saved him also from burying that fine old ballad of the Nut-brown Maid in the vault of *Henry and Emma*. The long poems of Prior would, in fact, have been long ago forgotten except by the very curious, if they had not been the work of the admirable improvisator of occasional pieces of the lightest and freest muse in the eighteenth century.

11 *Gay*—We think of *John Gay* (1688-1732) with the same sort of kindly tolerance as we give to Prior. An easy-going and indolent man, he had no enemies, which is worth mentioning in the eighteenth century, and was on good terms with Pope and his circle, though far too careless and lazy to join them in their war on the dunces. He had the happy fortune of the improvident in always having something or somebody turn up at the awkward moment. The close friendship of a duchess and the patronage of earls remained with him to the last.

He had the special faculty of writing in a simple and truly lyrical vein. His *Shepherd's Week* is a pastoral, inspired by Pope out of rivalry to Philips; it contains a few excellent and genuine country descriptions, besides a few scraps of country legend and custom. The *Trivia* deals in a mock-heroic vein with the humours of the London streets, and challenges another poem of Pope's, this time without

success. Similarly the *Fables* (1727) are tolerable, till we recall those of La Fontaine. His burlesque-opera, *The Beggar's Opera* (1728), was a great theatrical success, chiefly owing to the author's ability to write songs that would sing. It is this which gives distinction to the few poems of Gay that are worth saving. *Black-Ey'd Susan* is a ballad still popular, and deservedly so. Yet Gay's poetic gift was only slight, he was not in the main stream of literary development, and, but for his association with the greater men who were, he would have almost dropped from our memory.

CHAPTER XII

Reaction towards Romance

Thomson strikes a new note *The Seasons* *The Castle of Indolence*
 Young's *Night Thoughts* Blair Wesley
 Collins his *Odes* Gray *The Elegy*, the Pindaric Odes,
 the Norse Odes Warton Percy's *Reliques* Chatterton
 Ossian

1726	First book of Thomson's <i>Seasons Winter</i>	1748	Thomson's <i>Castle of Indolence</i>
1730	Last book of Thomson's <i>Seasons Autumn</i>	1750	Gray's <i>Elegy</i>
1742-45	Young's <i>Night Thoughts</i>	1757	Gray's Pindaric Odes
1742	Collins's <i>Persian Eclogues</i>	1762	The Ossian Poems
1743	Blair's <i>Grave</i>	1765	Percy's <i>Reliques of Ancient Poetry</i>
1744	Death of Pope	1768	Complete Poems of Gray
1746	Collins's <i>Odes</i>	1770	The Rowley Poems.
1747	Gray's Early Poems		

1 **James Thomson** — The period from 1720 to 1742, when Walpole was the dominating force in English politics, was one of the most sterile in our annals in noble deeds and elevating ideals. Walpole was himself occupied with matters of finance and with unromantic schemings for position and for peace. There was nothing in the air to stir men's blood or inflame their imaginations. Prosperity was followed by corruption in public and in private life, coarseness and lack of culture were, along with his worldly prudence, the hall-marks of Walpole and of the average country squire who associated with

him In the more polite circles of the literary and learned there was no true compensation for this Sceptical, satirical, cynical, the poems of Pope and the philosophy of Bolingbroke failed, because they were not meant, to arouse either enthusiasm or real respect The one lack was just this there must be no romance and no raptures, no excesses, no ideality, there must be no departure from the conventional standards either in morality or in literature And these standards were not the highest, so that when Pope ceased to write there was a pause for the apostle of new methods, and until that apostle came, our chronicle must be filled with the more or less interesting evolutions of men who were gifted enough often, but by no means sufficiently heroic to lead a poetic *coup d'état*

The poems of **James Thomson** (1700-48), for example, have been among the most popular and most widely read of English verses They are to be found in many humble homes, where Shakespeare, and often Bunyan, has not found his way The *Seasons*, of which the first part, *Winter*, came out in 1726, in the very heyday of Pope's supremacy, is often enough charming and occasionally beautiful in its descriptions of natural scenery, but it cannot be called strong work, and its influence, though genuine, did not extend very deeply during its own time For Thomson was not free from many of the tricks of diction and the artificial ornaments of style which were current coin among the poets of the time He was often florid and ponderously ornate, and it is possible to insinuate that his language was little more natural than Pope's Yet Thomson had an enthusiasm for nature as unaffected as it was uncommon He gave the world, not frigid and insincere pastorals, but first-hand drawings of things in nature which he had seen with his own eyes Everyone was familiar with the objects and scenes

that he describes so minutely. He was actually painting from the object, though he used the artificial colours which were in fashion. His love of minute nature was intelligent and contagious, and he has recorded his love in a blank verse which has a flavour all its own—Milton's verse, depressed by the eighteenth century grandiosity of taste.

Thomson's nature-studies are faithful, the accounts of an eyewitness that is the important point. But, are they anything more than photographs, carefully elaborated and tinted? The simple stories and everyday scenes are well described, but they are not, in the sense to which Wordsworth was to accustom us, *interpreted*. The sense of mystery, of awe, of spirituality—the feeling of God—is not there. The imagination of Thomson fails when he cannot rely upon his memory of material incidents: he could see things, but not into them. He was not able, therefore, to bring his age back to the romantic and idealising mood. His contemporaries admired his fat, indolent, good-natured personality, admired the skill with which he used words for the making of effective pictures, but found nothing in the *Seasons*, more than in the *Essay on Man*, to show them Nature as in her inmost meaning she really is. Once or twice, as in the hymn to Nature at the end of *Autumn*, he breaks into a real worship, which is eloquent but not greatly imaginative. A second-rate poet, skilled in common nature-lore and in faithful description, but only a faint harbinger of a new era such was Thomson.

The Castle of Indolence (1748), which alone among the remnants of Thomson's voluminous works deserves remembrance, strikes a more powerful note in literature than the *Seasons*. It recalls Spenser, and holds the candle to Keats and Shelley. The first of the two cantos contains some really enchanting work. It has an atmosphere. The picture of

the castle and its inhabitants has the appropriate lazy air, it is done in smooth and dreamy Spenserian stanzas, which suggest, not fairylands nor enchanted islands, but rather a Nirvana quite congenial to Thomson. In the second canto, in which the castle is besieged and captured by a certain knight of industry, Thomson is only carrying out a perfunctory task, he has his allegory to complete, and he is not so happy as in the first canto. From that we can extract real pearls of phrase, finely melodious descriptions, ripples of gentle laughter. Here is a fine stanza —

Full in the passage of the vale, above,
 A sable, silent, solemn forest stood,
 Where nought but shadowy forms was seen to move,
 As Idlesse fancied in her dreaming mood,
 And up the hills on either side, a wood
 Of blackening pines, ay waving to and fro,
 Sent forth a sleepy horror through the blood,
 And where this valley winded out, below,
 The murmuring main was heard, and scarcely heard, to
 flow

Stanzas such as these show that Thomson was, in a prosaic age, a real poet. But the notes of greater and higher moods were too faint in him to be heeded. His followers were men of inferior genius, such as Shenstone, or of no genius at all, like Armstrong. A great deal of his work, including *Liberty*, an ambitious poem on a large scale, his lyrics, and his tragedies, is worthless all, except *Rule Britannia*. But he survives as a precursor of Wordsworth and as a poet with real feeling for nature, often obscured by Latinised decoration and false rhetoric, but more often illuminated by that natural piety which seeks to make even the commonest things and the most trivial incidents of ordinary life beautiful and noble. Wordsworth admired Thomson, and Pope could not quarrel with him. There is the poet. But the man

was shy, yet friendly—a disciple of Epicurus who died a victim to the eagerness of his appetites

2 Young—The great influence of the Wesleys and the great success of a genuine and simple book like Thomson's *Seasons*, show that, behind the scepticism and the glitter of the higher circles, the heart of the nation was sound. The voice of faith and of truth had only to be raised, in order to be welcomed with joy. The welcome accorded to the *Night Thoughts* of **Edward Young (1683-1765)** is sufficient evidence of this. Young was undoubtedly a clever man, but never quite clever enough to gain the particular throne which he desired. He began literary work with two sombre religious poems in heroic couplets. Then he turned to the drama, and wrote some fairly successful tragedies in the high-flown rhetorical style which found favour in the seventeenth century. Next he turned to satire, and financially made another success with *The Love of Fame*, in 1728. But, by the side of the glittering *Dunciad*, what chance had the tamer verse of Young? Again he fell short of the topmost boughs. Not until he was an old man did he, from a country vicarage at Welwyn, near Hitchin, produce the poem which has given him real fame. Here, fretting his proud soul in vain pleadings for a bishopric, he lived some thirty-five years in an obscurity which he could not break. He fawned to the great, but he had to look on while younger and less able men were set above him.

This, however, does not so much concern us. The *Night Thoughts* had a great and, for the most part, deserved success. It is almost forgotten now, but it is not quite easy to see why. Young was, however, like Thomson, in being able to run fluently on into long screeds of blank verse, which had no qualities except those of sound and of rhetoric to atone for the absence of vital imagery and solid thought. Fine,

eloquent passages there are, rich in the best splendours of language, stirring in their imaginative appeal as the roar of trumpets on a battlefield. The purple passages of the *Night Thoughts* contain blank verse of almost Miltonic power and grandeur. They are rich in true poetic fancy, and stately with the lurid warmth of the setting sun. But these passages, of which one on procrastination and another on the death of friends are often quoted, are comparatively few. Young descends from the heights to the depths more abruptly than any other poet. Fine phrases are often found, starred in the weariest wastes of his interminable books, single lines crystallise themselves out of the frothy solution of his thought, but much of the rhetoric we must pronounce hollow, and much of the argument thin and untenable. The success of the poem cannot be based upon any pervading beauty of style, and the purple passages are not frequent enough to reproach us for our neglect of the *Night Thoughts* as a whole.

No but still we must attend to it a little closely, on account of its subject. Its success was the symptom of a change in the temper of literature, and in the audience to which it appealed. It was not a poem for the cultured circles, which indeed had by 1742 almost shrunk to mere points, it addressed the intelligent middle-class, and boldly opened to them the deepest and most personal of all themes. What Pope had failed to do in the *Essay on Man*, Young would attempt to do, Pope's faith was cold, vague, uncertain—at the best, intellectual. Young gave expression to the warm and implicit religious faith which lay dormant in the consciousness of the time, frozen by the cold scepticism of those who should have been its mentors. The *Night Thoughts* is a long argument in favour of immortality. In ten thousand lines of blank verse the poet struggles through nine books, or "nights," with the infidel

scoffer Lorenzo, whom he overcomes again and again. Who could be critical of the superheated and over-abundant rhetoric? Who could say that Young's view of life was gloomy and splenetic? Not the reader who, frozen with the disappointment of the *Essay on Man*, saw the rapture and the hope restored to his religion. Most of the poets of the eighteenth century, from Pope downwards, were didactic in their aim, but Young gave his age, not morality merely, but morality "touched with emotion." He showed by his success that the ground was ready for the more sincere and more human note which he himself did not quite find.

Blair — A similar popular success attended a much shorter poem on the same subject, entitled *The Grave*, by a young Scotch minister named **Robert Blair** (1699-1746). The vogue of *The Grave* was as long and as wide as that of *Night Thoughts*, and it is even more gloomy in its general tone than Young's poem. But, by reason of its lesser length and of the necessary condensation of thought, it is much more readable as a whole, though its ideas never rise above the commonplace. The most ordinary reflections on death and on the future life are slightly elevated by a simple and undistinguished blank verse which is much more rhetorical than poetical. But the general run of men welcomed the book as expressing their own notions, and its popularity shows that the gloomier aspects of religion were not absolutely uncongenial to the public of the eighteenth century.

Charles Wesley — The hymns of the Wesleys reflect also the same fact, and form one of the weapons which were accountable for the great success of the Wesleyan movement. The exceedingly active and interesting life of John Wesley does not belong to literature, because his hymns have very slight literary qualities. **Charles Wesley** (1708-88), however, was much more of a scholar and poet than

preacher or organiser, and some of his hymns have a genuine poetic value. They are not so hackneyed in expression as we find the vast mass of hymns to be, they are many of them free from the humdrum metres into which the average hymn-writer so easily falls, they are catholic rather than sectarian in their appeal, and, in short, are in some few cases true poems. "Jesu, lover of my soul" is one of our most beautiful hymns, "Come, O thou Traveller unknown" is less often heard, but has a lofty and truly lyrical note. But even Charles Wesley cannot be given a very high pedestal in the temple of literary fame. He is a figure in a great movement which was to emancipate his age from the thralldom of a narrow intellectual view of life, but, not so much as Thomson, nor any more than Young, could he dominate the thinkers and the interpreters of the time.

3 Collins — Soon, however, we come upon the sound of real poetry in the spare volumes which contain the works of Gray and Collins. These men sang their own song in their own chaste language. They sang, unheeding the tinkle of Pope, the monotones of Thomson, the noises of Young. In an age dominated by prose and by rhetoric, they gave utterance to a few lyric moods in verses of imperishable beauty. Neither was a robust poet, ~~neither had the temper of a literary dictator or innovator~~. There was nothing shrill, nothing to compel attention, in their singing. It was calm, and chastely lovely, just as the speedwell may open its eye unseen, or the violet perfume a solitary air, or the skylark soar into unwatched skies, Collins and Gray touched their lyre to heedless ears. They were, if it could only have been perceived, the prophets of their time, of too frail a temper to brand their message on to the hearts of men, yet glowing with the uncertain promise of the new spirit. To all poets that were to come,

they taught by their example the cardinal condition of all great literature Their muse bade them look into their own hearts and write down what they found there as perfectly as might be

It was in 1746 that the volume of odes appeared which contains what is best in the work of **William Collins** (1721-59) Collins was the son of a hatter in Chichester, he received a good education, which made him one of the most classical among our poets, but adopted no profession, and came up to London with his head full of vague projects which came to nothing He was of weak and nervously irresolute character, unsteady in his conduct, and fond of the erratic gaieties which appeal to those who are both clever and idle Collins became the friend of Thomson, who exercised no good influence on him, it is to be feared, he also knew Johnson, who was a good friend to him and was the only prominent person to praise his poems Little work came from his pen, not two thousand lines in all His indolence and brain-inertia grew upon him and rapidly developed into sheer disease He suffered from melancholia, and in 1750 disappears from view, he dragged on for nine years in a state of hopeless insanity, and died in 1759,

Without the meed of one melodious tear

While still an undergraduate, he published his first little volume of *Persian Eclogues* in 1742 The plan and the theme of these is artificial enough, the happiness of a country life was a common text even among the poets of Pope's school But Collins infused the breath of personal sympathy into the vague ~~Eastern air which he has given to the four tales~~ A sedate melancholy hangs gracefully over the poems The simply idyllic stories of Agib and Secander, of the pure love of the Persian prince, of

the luckless Hassan, with his repented eagerness for wealth, ~~are charming~~, because they are evidently sincere. The poet seems really to aspire to the simplicity which he sings. Amid the noise of the world he is himself in spirit.

Far off, in thoughtless indolence resigned,
where

Soft dreams of love and pleasure soothe the mind

The eclogues are indeed the product of that sensuous indolence in which thought is annihilated and emotion roams uncontrolled, which was thus early in his life congenial to the mind of Collins.

The *Odes* of 1746—a “still-born immortal,” as Swinburne terms it—contains the poetical pieces which for pure music and direct lyrical power surpass everything else in the eighteenth century except the songs of Burns and those of Blake. They are a pure voice striking, like the skylark’s, straight towards heaven. They have the chastity and the coldness of the ethereal spaces. Their melody is so soft, so natural, so inevitable, that we can only describe it as divine. We cannot analyse wherein the beauty consists, any more than we can dissect the wonder of beautiful curves and lines. Clearly, Collins loved to sing, and, to our great joy, loved to sing perfectly.

The best known of the odes is the one on *The Passions*, and by the fine resonance of its rolling verse it deserves all the good that many of our best critics have said about it. With scarcely a weak note, the melody flows on in majestic waves, carrying all the human passions on their crests of triumph or in their troughs of despair. The whole choir of the passions in a dreadful harmony speak as we know they speak: “Woe despair”, “Hope with eyes so

fair", "Joy's ecstatic trial" "Pale Melancholy", "Chcerfulness, the nymph of healthiest hue"—such are the subjects of the singer's song. There is nothing else quite like it in our poetry, only Gray by his love of personification and by his perfection of form, comes into closest affinity with Collins. Such lines as these do not indeed find their echo in Gray or elsewhere, but they recall his manner

Next angel rushed, his eyes on fire,
 In lightnings owned his secret stings,
 In one rude clash he struck the lyre,
 And swept with hurried hands the strings
 With woful measures, wan Despair
 Low, sullen sounds his grief beguiled
 A solemn, strange and mingled air,
 'Twas sad by fits, by starts twas wild

In the ode *To Liberty*, the opening note is as powerful as any that Collins has struck, but, as in *The Passions*, the subject is too big for the compass of his muse, and the inadequacy of the treatment is more patent here because of the falling-off of the verse after the first strophe. This pealing prelude in honour of the democratic liberty of Athens rushes forth in triumphal and thunderous melodies that are a simple ecstasy to all lovers of word-music. But it falls prostrate into the regular and comparatively jingling movement of riming couplets, and ends tamely. The worst of these lines, however, deserve to be preserved for their republican enthusiasm in an age of servile patronage. They tell of a genuine attempt to be true to the inward voice.

The ode on *Popular Superstitions* is interesting as a poem which celebrates the folk-lore of the Scottish Highlands. Some years before Burns, Collins perceived the poetry that lay behind the grim and wild superstitions of the Highland peasants. The poem is in many parts genuinely impassioned, and always

musical Reminders of Burns occur in several places
The luckless swain, with his vision of

The grim and grisly shape
In all its terrors clad,

is first cousin to Tam o' Shanter, and the suggestions of the strange customs of the seers of Skye are the forerunners of the similar customs described in *Hallowe'en*. Another echo, this time of Gray, will be obvious in the lines

For him in vain his anxious wife shall wait,
Or wander forth to meet him on his way,
For him in vain at to-fall of the day,
His babes shall linger at the unclosing gate

The music and the poetry are, for all these comparisons, Collins's own, they are the unpremeditated songs of a finely-trained voice, without the force of Gray's verses or the warm vitality of Burns's, but with a sweetness which they knew not

Of the shorter lyrics, that on *Evening* is the masterpiece. As a complete piece of poetic workmanship, perfect as a whole as well as in its parts, it perhaps surpasses the longer odes. In purity of tone, delicacy of touch, choiceness of imagery and language, it is certainly not inferior. Above these qualities it has the supreme virtue of lyric poetry: it interprets one mood of the human soul as completely as art can. The influence of the evening on our thoughts, of its reposefulness and its hush, is common to human nature of all times, its cool calm airs chasten even the unpoetic mood, the slow vanishing of the objects of the landscape awakens a momentary awe at least, in all. It is this atmosphere of cold pensive and fading stillness that Collins has thrown over his poem. The dreamy, meandering English of the first five stanzas are in wonderful accord with the vague whispers and soft breezes of twilight.

Kept indoors by winds and rains, forbidden to seek
the seductive influences in person, the poet longs for
a hut,

That from the mountain side,
Views wilds and swelling floods,
And hamlets brown and dim-discovered spires,
And hears their simple bell, and marks o'er all
Thy dewy fingers draw
The gradual dusky veil !

Generations of poets, lovers, friends, will pass
before they find the impression of eventide more
beautifully expressed Every word in the unrimed
and softly gliding lines tells The movement of the
whole is like the fall of evening, as evanescent, as
imperceptible

The ode on the *Death of Mr Thomson* is short and
simple, but of matchless beauty and simplicity It is
the outcome of real feeling for the loss of a generous
friend "Meek nature's child" had only a slight in-
fluence on the growth of Collins's lily-like genius, and
does not deserve so high a praise as Collins gave him
But the elegy itself is tender, feeling, pathetic, a gem
as pure, if smaller than, *Lycidas* or *Adonais* The very
short ode, "How sleep the brave," is a perfect lyrical
miniature, the dirge for *Cymbeline* is worthy to take
a place in the play itself—no small honour, the ode
to *Simplicity*,

A decent maid
In attic robe arrayed,

is a delicious sweetness, appropriately forcible is
that to *Fear*, soft and lady-like that to *Mercy*
graceful and purely melodious all

Collins surely knew what was and what was not
poetry For him the muses were the offspring of
creation All "the shadowy tribes of mind," and

All the bright uncounted powers,
Who fed on heaven's ambrosial flowers,

joined in the chorus whence poetry arose To few
 mortals does Fancy grant her godlike powers To
 Spenser, to Milton, to Waller but

Where is the bard whose soul can now
 Its high presuming hopes avow ?

Collins did not know Gray, little knew himself In these two the muses found humble but true servants, undistracted by the demands of their prosaic time—unlike Pope, and even Thomson, true to the poet's real mission—but unproductive for the same reason as that which forbids the palm to thrive in Greenland Amid a host of musical *instruments*, Collins had a *voice*, small but exquisitely sweet He stands alone in a frail pathetic pride, disdaining the arts of Pope, the rhetoric of Thomson, appealing to the fancy and to the heart with music that cannot shout, but only plead Isolated from all the influences that prejudiced his contemporaries, he struggled against his relentless environment, which crushed and bruised, and almost destroyed him But not quite From the far distance of a century and a half we can hear his voice still chirping its soft, small song The perfect art, recalling that of the immortal Greek singers, the lofty imagery, the successful use of allegory, the cold sublimity of his diction, give Collins an unassailable place in the ranks of English poetry And his sad life, sadder still in its close, will endear his priceless verses all the more to us, inasmuch as the world with an over-generous heart condones readily the lapses of a Goldsmith or a Sheridan, but has never been too kind to such as are too frail to battle with the rough armies of hard circumstances, and have yielded either to lassitude or despair It is easy to give a supercilious pity to the life of a Collins or a Cowper, but it is not easy to write odes of the divine quality of that to *Evening* The misfortune is that the mood which is transitory and so healthy

with normal minds was permanent and disastrous in Collins

4 **Thomas Gray** — A popular poet under any circumstances could Collins never become. His odes are the essence of scholarly poetry, and can only appeal to a trained poetic ear. But **Thomas Gray** (1716-71) was a much finer scholar than Collins, was even more fastidious in his choice of words, and yet has become one of our most popular poets, through his famous *Elegy*. Gray was throughout his life a melancholy recluse, who found an anodyne for his loneliness in travel and in deep classical study. He was the son of a London scrivener, the only one of twelve children to survive his childhood. His mother was a woman of devoted and quite heroic character; his father seems to have been a lazy rascal, who lived upon his wife's earnings. Through her care, the future poet was able to go to Eton and afterwards to Cambridge. From the first, Gray was of a reserved and melancholy disposition. At Eton he was studious, and took no part in sports or any of the other indulgences customary to public school life. He formed friendships with kindred intellects like Horace Walpole, whom he accompanied on a tour through Europe after leaving Cambridge, but he was in general shy, reserved, and fastidious, and too early developed the brooding habit which found words in the *Ode on a distant prospect of Eton College*, written in 1742. This ode, in spite of its opening stanzas, does not suggest that boyhood was for Gray the pure fountain of ceaseless delight which it normally is. He saw too early the "ministers of human fate" and "black Misfortune's baleful train."

At Cambridge, Gray spent the greatest part of his adult life. He was hampered by ill-health; his hereditary gout grew upon him as the years passed by. And so he became a recluse, a mere student, a

miser of knowledge His heart was indeed "pregnant with celestial fire", he was a poet with more of the real imaginative essence of poetry in him than Dryden or Pope, or both together Yet he became little more than a bookworm He delved deeply into the mines of learning, eschewing mathematics with the poet's prejudice, but absorbing all literatures, classical or modern, Gothic or Greek He knew much of architecture, painting, and all the fine arts, knew history well, was an antiquarian, and a critic of finely cultured taste, was up-to-date in science, philosophy, and religion, was, in brief, the most learned man in Europe But, of what avail was this vast accumulation? With the exception of some jottings and notes, of a series of letters which are a joy to every cultured mind, of a few monumental poems, it all died with him It would seem that Gray was a poet without the imperative impulse to creation, without the divine ambition to separate the jewels from their entanglements in the simple dead-weight of knowledge He had no stimulus to write, no pressure of outward circumstances to force him into active production, his mind was too delicate and too sensitive to seek for praise or fame in an age so indifferent to poetic genius, so soulless as that in which he had the ill-fortune to live This poet, whose letters show a man humane and humorous, cultivated and devoted to the highest, could not wrestle with the Philistines He sat down and looked at the world, pitifully, pathetically, with a kindly and delightful humour, but with resigned and silent acquiescence He could not speak, nor preach, he could not pipe to those who could not, or would not, dance, he could only dabble in poetry, distilling his lines slowly and moodily, examining them, purifying them, and refining them again and again His unwholesome life as a student was only broken by a few journeys into the beautiful spots of

Great Britain, but these journeys produced little or no poetry—alas, that it should be so!—when Gray saw nature with a loving poetic eye

What a loss to us, that a man with the heart of Gray could not battle with the "spiritual east wind," which was, as Matthew Arnold put it, at that time blowing. Gray was frozen, he could not stoop to converse poetically with his contemporaries, he became a dilettante—a Dr Dryasdust—almost! There are the poems few, but enough to make for him a roomy fame. Not spontaneous bursts of lyric melody—but noble elegies, noble odes, of Hellenic purity and perfection of form, of Pindaric grandeur.

His first odes were ready by 1742, but were not printed till 1747. Among these was the *Eton* ode, in which Gray has given lyric expression to his sense of the irony and the worthlessness of life. Several commonly current phrases have passed into the sub-consciousness of Englishmen from this poem, but its pessimism will not bear the investigation of a courageous mind. Life has very many sorrows, and no doubt the schoolboy would be a "little victim" if he knew his future throughout, but the discipline of difficulties is the condition of human greatness and goodness, and it is permissible for the imagination to dwell upon the seeds of noble character, of great deeds, of enduring work, which were being sown even among the boys whom Gray pitied. As a piece of perfectly wrought poetry, essentially elegiac and personal, the *Eton* ode is nevertheless one of the poems which we would not willingly lose.

The *Ode on the Spring* was the first of the odes, and contains the first real break from the domination of Pope's method that the age produced. In it the classical atmosphere is blent with a love of nature which makes us doubly irritated that Gray did so little in poetry. He might well have anticipated Wordsworth. Full of a delightful humour, and

touched with a light hand that we would fain have felt often, is the *Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat*. But Gray was too much oppressed by circumstances to cultivate again the irresponsible muse. His natural style and habit is forestalled in the stately *Hymn to Adversity*, a short poem of cold and severe grandeur, maintaining throughout a loftiness of mood which is quite Miltonic. Here we see the real Gray as he afterwards became, skilful in allegory, skilful in rhetoric, and perfect in form.

These little poems, however, did nothing towards giving Gray his reputation. This came from the *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard*, which was completed in 1749, after having undergone the severe ordeal of a preparation which extended over seven years. Gray did not himself regard the *Elegy* as his greatest poem, but all but a few of his readers have disagreed with him, and the *Elegy* is the poem by which he is best (and often solely) known. It is difficult to quarrel with the popular voice here: the poem is so chastely beautiful, so perfect, that criticism seems both ungracious and uncalled-for. We may, however, allow that the popularity of the *Elegy* is as much due to the subject as to the treatment. The thoughts expressed are everybody's thoughts, they arouse in most minds the deepest and most solemn of their moods. They are the property of all mankind, the learned and the simple alike. And it is the unique felicity of this scholar-poet that he has written one poem which is vocal to the many, and has reached the intelligences of those whose education has not been based upon the lore of the schools. From "the unhonoured dead," Gray has appealed to the unhonoured living with a most uncommon success.

We will not dishonour any reader of ours by supposing that he does not know Gray's *Elegy*, or most of it, by heart. We need only, then, remind him of the perfection of it as a piece of art. The

atmosphere of the churchyard of Stoke Pogis, one of our unique and lovely English villages, is upon the poem, along with the air of eventide, and the silence which the owl and the droning beetle and the tinkling sheep-bells make so deep. The reflections are never forced, they come forth in that perfectly melodious diction, that grave and reverent dignity, without a vestige of pomp or pose, which makes the language of great poetry on all occasions seem that which is inevitable under the circumstances. Change any word into an apparent synonym, and the poorest ear will feel that something is lost. Try to express the thought in the following stanzas, written down at random without any special choice. Then admire the condensed precision of such phrases as "the madding crowd's ignoble strife," and the perfect suitability of such an epithet as the "*nodding* beech"—

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
 Their sober wishes never learned to stray,
 Along the cool sequestered vale of life
 They kept the noiseless tenor of their way

There at the foot of yonder nodding beech,
 That wreathes his old, fantastic roots so high,
 His listless length at noontide would he stretch,
 And pore upon the brook that babbles by

As a contrast with the *Elegy*, the *Long Story* was written in 1750. It is an attractive trifle, and leads one to wonder what Gray might have achieved in the mock-heroic strain if his health had been better. His description of Miss Schaub does not recall the author of the *Elegy* so much as his friend, Horace Walpole.

The first came cap a pie from France,
 Her conquering destiny fulfilling,
 Whom meaner beauties eye askance,
 And vainly ape the art of killing

This, too, of Miss Speed is not deficient in a light, graceful humour

The other Amazon kind heaven
Had armed with spirit, wit, and satire ,

To celebrate her eyes, her air—
Coarse panegyrics would but tease her
Melissa is her Nom de Guerre
Alas ! who would not wish to please her

But the absence of distinction and of the spirit of spontaneous fun shows that this was not Gray's natural vein

The fastidious man of letters, chiselling his coldly ornate and perfect verses, reappears in the two Pindaric odes printed in 1757. Though nobody understood these poems, they established Gray's position as the first of living poets, and he was able to refuse an offer of the Laureateship two years later. Carlyle has described Gray's verses as laborious mosaic, but, while we may consent to the impatient dislike of the apostle of deeds for the shy and deliberate thinker, we may, nevertheless, point out that these odes, which represent Gray's greatest work, are in their way perfect. It is true that they carry all Gray's faults—his excess of personification, his love of strained compound epithets (such as "feather-cinctured"), his over-decorated and sometimes obscure rhetoric—but the laborious mosaic is often very fine and very fit, and each piece is harmoniously placed beside each other piece, so that the whole is most pleasing. Certainly the pleasure is most patent to the intellectual imagination. The references in some cases—those, for instance, to Delphi, Ilissus, and Mœander in the *Progress of Poesy*—call upon the capital of the scholar, and perplexed most of Gray's early readers. But, is that a condemnation of the odes as poetry? Is it not possible that there is a kind of poetry which, as

Gray said, is vocal only to the intelligent? If such there be, *The Bard* and the *Progress of Poesy* belong to that class. They have a ceremonious calm about them, congenial only to the highest courts of poetry. In each the idea is made to evolve, to work itself out perfectly. Gray aimed at such an effect as Pindar gained. The *Progress of Poesy*, at least, is not unworthy of the master. In majestic lines, almost surcharged at times with their grandeur, Gray follows the growth of poetry, stepping from the rude harmonies of primeval lyrics to Greece, thence to Italy, thence to England, where Shakespeare, Milton, and Dryden sang their noble songs, and where one daring spirit even now awakes his lyre. This spirit, Gray himself, does not inherit the Pindaric fire. He cannot aspire to the empire of poesy.

Yet shall he mount, and keep his distant way
Beyond the limits of a vulgar fate,
Beneath the Good how far—but far above the Great

Thus does Gray confess his high aims, and in these two Pindaric odes he has given us his best. As a fine combination of poetry and rhetoric, it would be difficult to match the opening stanzas of *The Bard*. And the figure of the bard himself has the terror and the dignity of a half-human prophet. It has been asserted, again, by the unsympathetic Carlyle, that we have in this poem, not dignity but a cold pomp, not feeling but mere wordy vehemence, no appeal to the soul but a superficial elegance of no real value. We have but to turn to Pope in order to answer such criticism as this. For Gray to have intruded his own personality too obviously, would surely have been the worst of art. In the *Elegy* there is surely a personality revealed, in *The Bard* there is, as we think, as surely revealed the spirit of a race, stricken almost to death—the spirit of music and culture floundering before the Philistines. And this last

seems to us the real spirit of the *Progress of Poesy*
To the scholar it is pathetic, it is tragical, to think
that he, who inherits

Nor the pride, nor ample pinion,
That the Theban eagle bear
Sailing with supreme dominion
Through the azure deep of air,

should be alone in upholding the glory of poesy
With sad sarcasm Gray complained of the unintelli-
gent critics who found his language obscure But he
had not the *vis viva* needed to make his complaint
heard

In thus striking the chords of pure poetry, Gray
redeemed his age from absolute barrenness Late in
life he turned his attention to Icelandic and Norse
subjects, but his two poems on the Norse legends
are failures Here his genius for perfected rhetoric
was hopelessly out of place The recluse has no
place in Valhalla, Odin was not one of his heroes
Yet in *The Descent of Odin*, and in *The Fatal Sisters*
too, there are fine stanzas they have not the Norse
tone, but the sense of unescapable destiny, the
feeling of a personified fate or Wyrð, is there

Dr Johnson praised these odes, but could not abide
"the cumbrous splendour" of *The Bard* The
estimate of Gray, to which "the great bear" com-
mitted himself, only proves, however, that he had not
the true criterion of poetry The Hellenic impulse
towards perfect form in his verse, was no doubt pre-
dominant in Gray, but the unfinished ode on
Vicissitude shows that he went also to nature for
inspiration The Norse odes, and *The Bard* in some
degree, show that he felt the romance of the vague
and imaginative past Common-sense was not his
deity, fashion was not his mistress He cultivated
the fountain-sources of the poetic gift He was a
romantic before Coleridge, a nature-poet before

Wordsworth, a free lance, escaped from the thralldom of satire and the couplet, before Cowper. But he was not spontaneous, he was not forceful, he was not filled with the fluency of the great interpreters. And so he died without disturbing the complacency of the eighteenth century spirit.

5 Signs of Romantic Taste — If we blame Gray for writing too little poetry, what are we to say about the accomplished student whose mind was enriched with all the learning of all the literatures, and whose critical faculty was of that rare order which only appears once in a generation? Gray meditated a history of poetry, but never carried it out. He did, however, the next best thing. He placed his material at the disposal of his friend, **Thomas Warton** (1728-1790), a poor poet, but an enthusiastic student. In spite of a laziness which was the result of adhering too sympathetically to the philosophy of Epicurus, Warton had learning more than enough to write what Gray only planned. His *History of English Poetry* (1774) threw men's minds back upon the great poets of the past, upon Chaucer, Spenser, and Shakespeare, and aided energetically the discomfiture of the eighteenth century fashion. The fight for romance was also driven nearer to success by the timely aid of other auxiliary forces. *The Reliques of Ancient Poetry*, a collection of old ballads, published in 1765 by **Thomas Percy**, an Irish bishop, set afoot an interest in the romantic folk-songs of our people which is still very vital. Percy's *Reliques* cannot be ignored in any survey of English poetry, however hurried. And we ought not to omit the interest in mediæval legends and in Gothic art shown by the cultured fop and dilettante, **Horace Walpole**. His *Castle of Otranto* (1764) is unreadable now, but it is romance. An interest in antiquities was the one memorable fact about the life of **Sir Hans Sloane** (1660-1752), the founder of the British Museum. All

these facts are fingerposts pointing to a great change. The love of landscape in Thomson begins the tale. The religious sincerity of Young, the personal lyric note in Collins, the enthusiasm for true poetry and the embryo of romantic exaltation in Gray, the printing of crude ballads, the absorption in antiquarian and historical studies—all made for the same goal. We shall not arrive there yet. Meanwhile we must record two cases in which the romantic mood was the dominant one, one of them of remarkable interest, the other of European influence and importance.

6 The Rowley Poems —The poems of the marvellous boy, **Thomas Chatterton** (1752-70), who, after a difficult boyhood, was apprenticed to an attorney and spent the very small portion of spare time that fell to his lot in writing and reading poetry, recall unmistakably the romantic atmosphere of the Middle Ages. At the early age of thirteen he conceived the plan that makes him famous in the story of literature. He would write a cycle of romantic stories with the Norman Conquest for their centre, and, as he was fascinated by his study of old English poems and remains, he determined to write them in an archaic style and to pass them off as the work of a mythical fifteenth century writer, Thomas Rowley, a priest of Bristol. Working every moment he could obtain, he at length had a series of the manuscripts ready. With boyish eagerness he sent them to Horace Walpole, who judged them very favourably, but sent only a dose of good worldly advice to the romantic young poet. But Chatterton's enthusiasm for his work was too powerful to be snubbed away. His nature glowed with the ardour of real romance, and in 1770 he gave up his clerkship and came to London. There he found great difficulty in living. He soon spent his little capital of five guineas, and some second-rate magazine work scarcely kept body and

soul together His poems were not favourably received The fine *Ballade of Charitee*, herald of Keats' *Eve of St. Agnes*, was refused by the editors, and Chatterton retired to his garret in despair He destroyed a vast quantity of verse which he had written The sensitive spirit could not fight, and was too proud to ask mercy from a ruthless world Not eighteen years of age, he poisoned himself Neglected and scorned, he was nevertheless the truest poet of his time Even Johnson admitted that he was the most extraordinary young man of his knowledge "It is wonderful how the whelp has written such things," was his comment

The Rowley poems must not of course be treated as Middle English poems Evidently Chatterton had dipped deeply into Spenser and Chaucer, but he clearly did not know their language The poems are from this point of view merely frauds But, give to Chatterton the credit of their original composition, and we must hold our breath in wonder There is naturally more rhetoric than poetry, equally naturally there is much bombast, much high-sounding and unmeaning language, but, in such poems as the *Songs of Ælla*, the *Ballade of Charitee*, and *Elinoure and Juga*, there is also a sense of melody, a feeling of atmosphere, a tone which can only be described as romantic The spirit of the past inspired Chatterton, no mere vulgar desire for fame, but the gleam of the true poetic vision, led him on And when he died there must have been grief among the Muses, for he who could have added a new tributary to their golden waters was cut off ere the spring of his poetry could find a certain course We did not lose a Shakespeare by the death of Chatterton, but echoes of Shelley and of Keats, which frequently meet us in the Rowley poems, declare that we lost at least a romantic poet of rare genius

7 **Ossian**—The breath of romance was caught

up also in Scotland, and produced another elaborate forgery. We have no space for the gentle pastoral muse of **Allan Ramsay** (1686-1758), nor for the songs of **Robert Ferguson** (1750-74), who inspired Burns. But the supposed translation of the Gaelic folk-poems, made by a Highland schoolmaster named **James Macpherson** (1738-96), has a special significance. The poems of Ossian appealed to the minds of men so different as Napoleon and Goethe, but England, almost unanimously following the lead of Dr Johnson, has from the first doubted their genuineness. We have seen how that aspect of romance which looks to the past for inspiration had taken, in Chatterton, the form of a revival of mediævalism, in Macpherson, it went still further back into that vague dream-time when the Celtic peoples possessed the land. Macpherson awoke the Celtic spirit, and to those who see in the Celt the ghost of an ancient order in which music, beauty, poetry, nature-worship were the dominant ideals, he is a prophet and seer of the highest rank. But to the common-sense of the mere Teuton, he is a raving mystic or a clever humbug. Common-sense calls upon him to produce his originals, and to submit his credentials as a Gaelic scholar to public criticism. And when he refuses, there is no more to say: he is an impostor.

Now, we are not going to discuss this point. The question whether Macpherson did or did not find the stories of Ossian among the people of the Western Highlands, is one of chiefly antiquarian interest. The trend of the evidence is against him. A few ballads and the traditions of the wild Highland folk seem to have been the only basis of a set of prose-poems which the Celtic enthusiasts can only fittingly compare with Homer. To them the exploits of Fingal are parallel in literary importance with those of Achilles. Ossian, son of Fingal, the supposed centre of the legendary cycle, is the Celtic Homer,

and really lived in the third century A.D. We need not say that such a claim for these productions is absurd, although Macpherson, who in 1773 turned the *Iliad* into similar prose, may have had Homer in mind when he made his "translations." But nothing could be less Homeric than the indefiniteness and vagueness of nearly the whole of Ossian. The world is seen as in an autumn twilight, when the sun is lurid behind the mists wherein the horizon is lost. We see nothing clearly, vividly. The fights, the feasts, the songs, seem to take place in the land of spirits, to bring their sounds to us muffled by antiquity, to suggest far more than they can say. In this sense the Ossian poems were a potent voice in the oncoming renaissance of the spirit of wonder. They are artificial, but it is idle to deny them both beauty and significance. The translator knew both Homer and the Bible well, but there is another spirit also in such a passage as the following —

The heroes flew like two dark clouds — two dark clouds that are the chariots of ghosts, when air's dark children come forth to frighten hapless men. It was then that Gaul, the son of Morni, stood like a rock in night. His spear is glittering to the stars, his voice like many streams.

"Son of battle," cried the chief, "O Fingal, king of shells! let the bards of many songs soothe Erin's friends to rest. Fingal, sheath thou thy sword of death, and let thy people fight. We wither away without our fame, our king is the only breaker of shields. When morning rises on our hills, behold, at a distance, our deeds. Let Lochlin feel the sword of Morni's son, that bards may sing of me."

Many a voice and many a harp, in tuneful sounds arose. Of Fingal's noble deeds they sung, of Fingal's noble race. And sometimes, on the lovely sound, was heard the name of Ossian. I often fought, and often won in battles of the spear. But blind, and tearful, and forlorn I walk with little men! O Fingal, with thy race of war, I now behold thee not! The wild roes feed on the green tomb of the mighty king of Morven! Blest be thy soul, thou king of swords, thou most renowned on the hills of Cona.

These Ossianic poems were published in 1762 And surely it was not to be expected that those who still held to Pope as the model poet, that he to whom one green field was like another green field, and to whom the Scotch were the most contemptible of mankind, could catch the evanescent beauty, like that of hazy skies, of such writings as these Fingal, Ossian, Temora, Selma, Croma, Comala, were not names of romance, but inventions of a hypocrite, the wild Gaels could not possibly hold such traditions and such songs! But, even if they were the invention of Macpherson, the tales have the faltering accent and the infinite sadness of age, they tell us that

There hath passed away a glory from the earth,

they are the dirge of a vanishing people They called the mind back from its worship of the prosaic present to the worship of nature, of song and patriotism, of heroic deeds They brought back the sense of awe to our vision of the universe, and this, in an age of prose, was no slight merit it may atone for all Macpherson's faults—for his sameness, his vagueness (where precision might have been an advantage), his fraud

CHAPTER XIII

The Novel

Germens of the Novel in Early Literature Richardson *Pamela*,
Clarissa *Sir Charles Grandison* Richardson's Influence
 Fielding His View of Life and of the Novelist's Art
Joseph Andrews *Tom Jones* *Amelia* *Jonathan Wild*
 Smollett Sterne Minor Novelists Fanny Burney

Samuel Richardson (1689-1761)

1740 *Pamela*
 1748 *Clarissa Harlowe*
 1751 *Sir Charles Grandison*

Henry Fielding (1707-54)

1742 *Joseph Andrews*
 1743 *Jonathan Wild*
 1749 *Tom Jones*
 1751 *Amelia*

**Tobias George Smollett
 (1721-71)**

1748 *Roderick Random*
 1751 *Peregrine Pickle*
 1758 *History of England*
 1761 *Sir Lancelot Greaves*
 1771 *Humphry Clinker*

Laurence Sterne (1713-68)

1759-67 *Tristram Shandy*
 1768 *A Sentimental Journey*

1764 Horace Walpole's *Castle of Otranto*
 1778 Fanny Burney's *Evelina*,
 1782 Fanny Burney's *Cecilia*
 1794 Mrs Radcliffe's *Mysteries of Udolpho*

1 Beginning of the Novel — The novel is so much with us to-day, that we find it difficult to picture the time when it was not. Yet it was not until the year 1740 that a novel, in our modern sense of the word, had been written. The Elizabethan period had its *Arcadia*, its *Euphues* and their numerous progeny. The seventeenth century saw many of the elements

which go to making the material for the novelist, in the character-writings, in the *Pilgrim's Progress*, and in the heroic romances which were in vogue during the latter end of the century, and of which Mrs Aphra Behn's *Fair Jilt* is a favourable example. And further, the *Spectator* contained many most charming character sketches, while Defoe, without any power of character evolution, could tell a graphic tale, fictitious or not, with great skill. But no *novel* had yet appeared. And this is the more remarkable, as the novel is clearly the most faithful and the most obvious mirror of the age which produces it. The novelist has so much freedom he can give life in its undress, in its chaos and its wildness, and thus has the advantage over the poet, he can indulge in a hundred delightful asides which cannot be permitted to the dramatist, he may commingle comedy with tragedy, and escape criticism, he may himself flit about among his heroes and heroines, personal and omnipresent, and no critic, however precise, shall say him nay. This is the novelist as Fielding conceived him not a tale-teller merely, nor an artist of character only, not a psychologist, nor a historian, nor a moralist but all these. He is the good spirit who lifts up the veil of ordinary manners, and shows the eternal human nature below them. By a *tour de force* denied to all but the very highest genius, Shakespeare had done this poetically. And it would not be wrong to say that the drama, of all the literary forms, comes nearest to the novel. It filled its place in the days when the novel proper did not exist. From the days of Ben Jonson down to those of Dryden and Congreve, the drama was the glass of contemporary manners, and it was when the drama had so far declined in vogue that men like Fielding could not make their plays pay, that the public demanded a new sort of mirror, and recognised it in the novels of Richardson and Fielding

The immense success of these first novels shows that they met a real public need. They were so easy to read, so entertaining, so human, that the idlest and the least romantic of readers could devour them with greedy ease.

That the eighteenth century should have seen the birth of this new form of literature is not surprising. The theory of poetry which Pope personified really reduced poetry to prose, and the novel carried this idea to its honest and logical issue. It is essentially the imaginative interpretation of life in prose. Pope's aim was ethical and moral—"the proper study of mankind is man"—and the aim of Richardson was no less moral. His types of character were set up for didactic purposes, like Pope's, he would have been shocked by the suggestion that he wrote merely to please his readers. But his mind was rather in the groove of Young's than in that of Pope's. It is fortunate that he surpassed Young, and sprang by instinct to a higher point of view, but his atmosphere was essentially that which influenced Young. He helped to reclaim the age from its slavery to its conceptions of polite but artificial manners. He helped to recall us to nature, to the emotional treatment of men and women, to that interest in the soul of things which we call romance. Himself prosaic, and in his own way intensely conventional in his outlook on life, Richardson nevertheless turned the thoughts of his readers from the external semblances to the heart. The novel took many irregular courses during its hot-blooded youth, but its whole tendency was towards freedom and individuality, it delivered literature from the hothouse air which enervated all writers who bowed before the throne of the Georgian wits, it led, in short, towards romance.

2 Richardson — Samuel Richardson (1689-1761) was not an author by profession or by education, neither was he ambitious of any purely literary dis-

tion. He was a prosperous and pedantic man of the *bourgeois* type, a man of business with a bump for preaching and moralising, a black-coated, pompous, and self-satisfied printer. From early life he had been addicted to much letter-writing, and to giving advice to grateful ladies upon their affairs of the heart. His knowledge of the female sex, among whom he found most of his admirers and readers, was certainly profound and unmistakable, and this knowledge was responsible for his sentimental and even namby-pamby turn of mind, which prevented him from ever doing justice to the sterner sex. He was a valetudinarian who suffered from imaginary as well as real ailments, he was childishly vain, and it was his great delight to be the focus of an adoring circle of hero-worshipping ladies, who listened to his readings of *Clarissa* as it was being written, and fell at his feet, tearfully imploring him to spare his heroine and to lessen her unmerited sufferings.

Pamela, the first of his novels, appeared in 1740, when its author was over fifty. It arose from a desire on the part of a friendly bookseller to have some of Richardson's model letters of advice to ladies printed for the public benefit. In yielding to the suggestion, Richardson hoped, as he himself says, to turn the attention of the young from the reading of foolish romances, and to attract them into the love of virtue and good conduct. With this end in view, and remembering that example is always better than precept, he arranged the letters in the form of a continuous story, which told how one Pamela Andrews, a servant-girl, had, by her virtuous resistance to the wiles and temptations of her master, who had conceived an improper love for her, risen triumphant over her difficulties and dangers, and been rewarded by winning over her tempter into the path of a virtuous married life.

From the point of view of the novel, the method

of telling a tale in letters has many disadvantages. For, although it brings us into the closest intimacy with the characters, it is evident that the whole of life does not enter into even the most voluminous correspondence, and a great strain is placed upon our credulity at, for instance, Pamela's epistolary industry. But the method was exactly suited to the genius of Richardson. His great strength lay in the fidelity of his minute details, every shade of feeling, however delicate, in the heart of his heroines receives the fullest treatment, emotions are submitted to a microscopic analysis, as truthful in its results as any author has ever been. Richardson loved his task, loved to hear his own voice, and laboured unwearyingly to lay bare every nerve in Pamela's heart, to show every quivering of her lips. To us of the high-speeded twentieth century, Richardson's novels are too prolix, too "long-winded", but it is useless to attempt to know Richardson in any abbreviated form. *Pamela* is long, is tedious, but so, often enough, is life. The slowness of movement was all too fast for many of *Pamela's* admirers. They could not have too much of her. They liked her, not for her story so much as for her sentimental and somewhat commonplace virtue. Her sorrows and her tears were so genuine that everybody loved and pitied her, and every female reader thrilled with gratitude to the author who rewarded her for her virtue with all that the *bourgeois* mind deemed worthy—a fine establishment, with a bevy of servants and her coach-and-six. *Pamela*, in short, was a great success, but its chief glory now must be that of the first-fruits which promise the rich harvest. A greater than Richardson was stimulated by it to enter upon the calling that was meet for his genius: the first *great* novelist appeared in 1742, with a challenger to Pamela's fame.

But before making Fielding's acquaintance, we

have to note that Richardson improved upon *Pamela* when, in 1748, he completed his *Clarissa Harlowe*, still the greatest novel of pure sentiment that we have. Very long, very minute, it does not weary us as *Pamela* does. It is more pathetic, but more real. Clarissa herself is so much nobler and more human than Pamela, that she remains with us as one of the most beloved and most pitied heroines in fiction. She is a truly tragic personage, and her tale is real tragedy. She was the daughter of narrow-minded but honest middle-class parents, of excessive respectability, and, being anxious to accept the attentions of a Colonel Lovelace, she was thrown into agonies of misery by their refusal to allow her to do so. Her life became unbearable to her, and at last her weak mind yielded to the temptations of Lovelace, and she ran away from home with him. How he seduced her, and left her, frail and shamed, helplessly to face the world, how she was at once too delicate and too pure in her heart to have any chance in the great struggle, how she died, like a lily, tenderly treated in some hothouse, and then exposed to the icy winter winds, how her rascally seducer was punished for his crimes—Richardson has told with the unrelenting minuteness of the mills of the gods, which grind exceeding slowly, but exceeding small and sure. In *Clarissa* we have purity of character joined with irresolution and helplessness, we have the antagonism of circumstances, the relentless pressure of destiny, we have all the elements of great tragedy, and *Clarissa* is, with Cordelia and with Ophelia, among the hapless angels of literature. Resisting the entreaties of his adorers, Richardson with sure instinct knew that *Clarissa* must die. In dying she lives, as *Pamela* with all her good-luck never will again. Amid all her troubles, even in the hour of her failure, *Clarissa* is always triumphant in our hearts. Hers is the

virtue Pamela's is a much more selfish quality, a self-interested prudence, or very little more

To Richardson, however, this aspect of the matter did not appeal. He was a rigid formalist. His code of morals was external: he judged entirely by the result. The deed, and not the motive, was all, and thus Clarissa's fate must be thought of as a punishment for a lapse from virtue which her will did not honour and which in no way sullied her real self. But in spite of this imperfect moral theory, *Clarissa Harlowe* is a great book. It is one of the most artistic of books, written by one of the least artistic of men. It is true in a sense higher than its author knew.

Richardson's third novel, the *History of Sir Charles Grandison* (1751), was an attempt to place a model gentleman by the side of his model ladies. But the man of all the accomplishments is a very insufferable fine gentleman. If he is not a prig, he is at least a very accomplished Pharisee. Any one less like that robust old type of simple English gentleman, which is still happily not quite extinct, cannot be conceived. Sir Charles is too benevolent, he is irritatingly polite and suave, absurdly calm and dignified even in his love-making. He is, in fact, a woman's man of Richardson's own type, glorified into a country squire who scatters among his flattering subjects the smiles or the sighs that are proper to all occasions. But, as a book, *Sir Charles Grandison* compares favourably with *Clarissa*. It is quicker, more dramatic, better written. Yet it is the least readable of the three stories to-day.

When we observe that Richardson had no humour, no liveliness or verve, no romantic elevation, no ideal of life higher than that of a respectable tradesman, no knowledge of the male sex, we see how much he was handicapped as a novelist. But for all that he was proclaimed the equal of Homer and Euripides.

by a critic so clear-headed as Diderot, in Germany he was welcomed with equal enthusiasm, and in his own country, while men like Dr Johnson did not like *him*, they recognised his greatness. He was the founder of the sentimental novel, as Fielding was the founder of the more vital novel of manners. Sensibility was his strong point. There is more knowledge of the human heart in one page of Richardson than in all *Tom Jones*. Yes, worthy lexicographer! More knowledge of the heart, but less—far less—knowledge of life. For Fielding, as we think, was one of our greatest ones, the most Homeric of all our fiction-makers.

3 **Fielding's *Joseph Andrews***—It was in response to the mawkish self-righteousness of *Pamela* that **Henry Fielding** (1707-54) set about writing his *History of Joseph Andrews and his Friend, Mr Abraham Adams*. Fielding was connected with one of the younger branches of the Denbigh family, and was born in Somersetshire in 1707. His early education was given him by the family chaplain, Mr Oliver, whose character is supposed to have inspired the portrait of Parson Trulliber in *Joseph Andrews*. This portrait is decidedly more humorous than flattering: the very fat person, whose gait is that of a goose (but slower), and whose first care was to introduce Adams to his hogs, had fallen very near to the condition of the beast he most prized. He could make a long oration upon the dignity of the cloth, but held no great opinion of Adams, his fellow-minister, because he could not handle a hog properly; he showed the quality of his mind when his wife was handing a cup of ale to their guest.

Whilst they were at table her husband gave her a fresh example of his greatness, for as she had just delivered a cup of ale to Adams, he snatched it out of his hand, and crying out, "I caal'd vurst," swallowed down the ale. Adams denied it, it was referred to the wife, who, though her conscience was on the

side of Adams, durst not give it against her husband Upon which he said, "No, sir, no, I should not have been so rude to have taken it from you, if you had caal'd vurst, but I'd have you know I'm a better man than to suffer the best he in the kingdom to drink before me in my own house, when I caale vurst"

We may hope that this picture is overdrawn, at all events Fielding passed from Mr Oliver to Eton, which place seems to have suited his disposition well enough Full of animal spirits, our novelist found, doubtless, attractions more potent than those of the school routine, but he had some useful classical knowledge, as well as a happy wit and a susceptible temperament, when he left in order to study medicine at Leyden We read of an unfortunate love affair early in his life, and we may judge that in this respect the future novelist was, like Burns, too easily impressed by feminine charms, as he was overcome with bitter repentances when the fits were past His heroes are by no means squeamish, but they suffer much more than they enjoy, and easily obtain their artist's forgiveness At Leyden, Fielding did nothing worth mentioning, funds failed him, and he came to London in 1728, to live by his wits

These being considerable and very versatile, we find him active in many different directions during the next fourteen years He married an exemplary lady, the Amelia of his last novel, but he was only an indifferent husband, if the Captain Booth of *Amelia* in any way represents him Generous and easy-going, the captain was often in debt and in the hands of the bailiffs Deeply attached to his wife, whose purity and beauty he knew were the attributes of a saint, he nevertheless reduced her to the verge of poverty by his heedlessness and improvidence Amiable, forgiving, impulsive, unfortunate, the gallant humorist fought the battle of London life, and remained imperturbably

calm and unprejudiced in his outlook on mankind. Sympathy with the faults that seem to spring straight from human nature, and contempt for all pretence, all affectation and hypocrisy—these were the lessons which bitter experience was to yield to Fielding. For him the pious phrases of a Richardson, his copy-book precepts, his cold-blooded formalism, seemed to have no relation to the facts of existence. Years spent in the turbid waters of London life, in its lightless alleys, in its garrets, its spunging-houses, and perchance its prisons, years spent in struggle, among all the thousand types of character which high London and low London had to show, pressed out of Fielding's nature all its cant and all its vanity. He is rough, sometimes coarse, often even indecent—what wonder? Is not life itself so? And oftentimes he is tender, fine in his touch as Shakespeare's self. And always he is honest and manly and downright, always is he on the side of truth, of real goodness, and sincere love, always is he humorous, kindly ironical, bitter only against the Thwackums and the Blifils, the liar and the hypocrite. The spirit of genuine comedy is in him, the fairy of genial and kindly laughter was his godmother. That divine power to smile at the tricks of fortune survived in him until the year of his own sad end.

He was immersed in satirical work, busied himself with lampoons on a variety of themes, and made some sort of success by writing comedies. But the vein of Congreve had worked itself out, and Fielding could not strike out a really original line. He tried political comedies, and put Sir Robert Walpole in disguise upon the stage, but Parliament intervened and enacted that all plays must be submitted to the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain. Fielding gave up the drama, took up journalism, read law, and was called to the bar in 1740. It was while he was practising on the western circuit that *Joseph Andrews*

was written. A wider field for his comic gift was now opened to him, the old comedy was dead, the public was ready for the new.

This new departure in literature was taken at first unconsciously. The morals of *Pamela* did not suit Fielding. She was not, as he thought, true to human nature—a cardinal crime, and he set about a parody which should hold Richardson, and those unrestrained admirers of his who did not hesitate to place *Pamela* on the same shelf as their Bible, up to the ridicule decreed to the self-deluded. Joseph Andrews was the brother of Pamela, and Fielding began to tell the story of his temptation and of his resistance thereto, how he was wholly worthy of his sister, and preserved his virtue in spite of the allurements of womankind as impersonated by Lady Booby, the aunt of Pamela's husband. Such a parody was tame enough, and scarcely became the dignity of true art. Fortunately Fielding soon forgot his first design, and his parody developed into a comic romance, that is, in his own words, into a comic epic poem in prose.

A preface, short, clear, and in all ways admirable, sets out the theory of comedy as Fielding understood and practised it. It was for him a representation of life, not in its solemn and graver moods, which are the subjects of tragedy, but on its lighter and more laughable side. "The Ridiculous only," he says, "falls within my province," and "the only source of the true Ridiculous is affectation," whether the affectation spring from vanity or from hypocrisy. To create ridicule by means of vice, or by exposing the distress and miseries of ignorance or poverty, would be the falsest comedy, to excite laughter by caricatures or burlesqued humanity, is equally untrue, in his view, to the genius of comedy. But, of course, he cannot keep clear of vice or of misery, if he is to draw life completely. He can, however, declare that he never drags it into light, and only holds it up to

detestation when it is seen, as inevitably it must often be, in life. Realising thus that his aim is that of Cervantes, and of Ben Jonson,

To sport with human follies, not their crimes,

we must not expect in Fielding the high visions of the Shakespeares, the Goethes, the Miltons of literature. His palace was not built on Olympus, nor was his study in the groves of Academe; he did not feed on honey-dew, nor drink "the milk of paradise", his eye rested, when it did rest, upon the turbulent animal life of the thronged streets, upon their squalor and their unhappy denizens. He looked not up to ethereal spaces or for fairy thrones. Content if he could see man as he was, find the springs of his mirth and his tears, expose his littleness and some of his greatness, Fielding sowed the fruitful seed which gave us the true modern novel.

Yet, limited as his aim was, how great is the result! What irony! What wisdom! What humour, sympathy, knowledge of life! Every page of *Joseph Andrews*—still more every page of *Tom Jones*—contains some example of masterly insight, of self-revealing human nature, of flashing satire most pregnant in its consequences. The tale in *Joseph Andrews* is humdrum and simple to a degree, it is puerile, but this epic of the high road, in the good old days when coaches and footpads competed for the mastery, thrills us almost everywhere with a sense of life. The inns, the innkeepers and their wives, their maids and their lovers, the noise and the bustle, the coarseness and politeness changeable as the travellers who become their object, the bickering about the reckoning, the discussions and the bargainings here they all are, as we are sure they were when Fielding wrote. The coaches, too, with their motley occupants, rumble through the tale as they rumbled along the muddy and rutty lanes. High-

wayman and pedlar, poacher and lawyer, prude and prim matron, jostle one another and help to make up the crowded phantasmagoria which is the most lifelike of all the great works of the eighteenth century, *Tom Jones* and Hogarth's pictures alone coming into competition with it

But the movement and the vitality of the book are not its all. The characters are full-drawn, and several of them are enduring types which cannot be supplanted by changes of fashion or atmosphere. Joseph himself and his adored Fanny are not so interesting as some of their comrades, though their love-story is almost an idyll in its simple freshness and purity. But the good parson, Adams, Joseph's faithful friend and pastor, is one of the most delightful personalities in all fiction. A curate, subsisting upon less than thirty pounds a year, with a wife and family to uphold, he is ambitious only to be the father of every one of his flock. He will go to the Pole in the interests of a parishioner, but he is loth to leave his parish when called to a cure of a hundred and twenty pounds a year. He is as innocent of the ways of the great world as the most ignorant of the yeomen or yokels that listen to his ministrations. He is the prey of every joker or swindler that comes across his path. His trust in men is boundless, and he cannot comprehend an unchristian or inhospitable priest like Trulliber. A hypocrite is forever beyond the fathom of his imagination. Into what pitfalls he stumbles, into what contemptuous predicaments he falls again and again, we cannot detail here. But even while he lies sprawling among parson Trulliber's hogs, or while he stands in Mrs Towwouse's kitchen bespattered with hog's blood, or while he sits in a tub of water, the victim of a foolish squire's practical jokes, he does not lose his dignity or our respect. It is the unsullied and native dignity of human nature that is outraged when we see him thus victimised

His indignation with all want of charity and human kindness, his sympathy with the unfortunate, his ready rebukes and naive sermons, his devotion to Æschylus, his sincerity, fuse into an altogether most lovable personage, and make a triumph of characterisation. The man who knew the pillars of Hercules, but had never heard of the Levant, could not expect to be taken for a man of the world, but through him Fielding shows us the fate and the triumph which await simple virtue and simple tastes in a world where there is so much hypocrisy, so much specious goodness, and so much repulsive vice.

Parson Adams was enough to make the fortune of one book, but there are several more immortals in *Joseph Andrews*. A long time after reading the book, we have not forgotten Mrs Slipslop, the attendant of Lady Booby, with her "derangement of epitaphs," her weathercock accommodation to the moods of her mistress, her assumption of gentility on to the coarsest of natures. Mrs Towwouse, the shrewish innkeeper, remains in the memory also, and Mr Peter Pounce is an avaricious rogue, delineated in the fewest possible touches. Nearly all the minor characters, who do no more than flit into the tale, somehow leave their personalities behind them as they go. One thing only stains the pages of this, as of Fielding's other novels. His habit of interjecting scenes, which the taste of our time rightly describes as indecent and unnecessarily frank, makes his tales disagreeable to minds trained in the restrained atmosphere of Dickens or Thackeray. But this much is to be said of him: he has lit the torch of humour, in order to explore the dim passages of life, his light shines impartially upon the good and upon the evil, and both are made to appear what they are. If he has given us Mrs Slipslop and Mr Towwouse, he has also created pretty Fanny and the

good Mr Wilson And surely we shall find that vice,
as shown to us by Fielding,

Is a monster of such frightful mien,
That, to be hated, needs only to be seen

Surely we shall see that it is Parson Adams and the pure Amelia who carry Fielding's real sentiments on to posterity

4 **Fielding's *Tom Jones***—No new characteristics except those of greater power and much wider range appear in *Tom Jones*, probably the greatest product of the eighteenth century in literature This book appeared in 1749, and is in every way a masterpiece ✓ The plot of the story, although sufficient to keep up its interest, is again its least attraction As a picture of life—no fastidiously-finished vignette, but a crowded canvas glowing with vitality—only Thackeray and Dickens can submit its equal It is full of the breezy and healthy vigour of youth, a foe to sentimentality and sickly affectations, through-blown by the storms and hushed by the calms of nature, eager, fresh, buoyant, and hopeful, redolent of the richest comedy Tom Jones himself is the real hero of the book, a foundling, carelessly educated in one sense, but happy in being brought into daily contact with his good foster-parent, Squire Allworthy But Tom loves his pony and his gun better than his books, he is addicted to the society of gamekeepers in preference to that of his tutors, and he grows up an unconventional, hot-blooded, but generous and honourable young man Thrown into the world, he flounders into a hundred scrapes, some of them by no means to his credit, all of them bringing him both remorse and disaster Evidently Fielding delights to show us the consequences of his hero's animal spirits, and to display him, after his wildest escapades, in his most generous light Tom is constantly making us angry with his indiscretions, and tantalising

ing us into love for his kindly and ever-ready good-nature. If Tom is ready to use his fists with very little provocation, he is always ready to fight for the distressed, if he is fond of the ladies and false to the memory of his adorable Sophia, at least he is ready to sacrifice his own convenience for the worst or the humblest of them. If he is often heedless and headstrong, he alone suffered for his faults. And the result is that, with all his faults, we love Tom Jones, not as an immaculate hero, but as a genuine erring youth. It has been said that, in making Tom Jones thus delightful in our minds, Fielding upheld the doctrine that there are certain defects in human nature which do not matter and which we need not bother to overcome. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Tom always suffers *some* ill consequences from his errors, but Fielding is not much concerned with them. His view is that some human faults which spring from the intellect are infinitely worse than those which leap, as it were, from our human nature itself. The burst of anger from a hot-blooded youth, repented almost as soon as over, is *natural*, and a venial offence. The meanness which springs from a calculating hypocrisy is *unnatural*, and can receive no toleration. In order to appreciate one of our masters in comedy, this point must be clear to us. He is essentially a moralist, with the patient and clear-souled toleration of the man who has seen much, felt much, sympathised much. His is the meat of the strong mind. But, out of the strong comes forth sweetness.

It is impossible to do justice to *Tom Jones* in any space that we can command. The thrilling life, the subtle and bold characterisation, the humour, the delightful digressions, the excellent descriptions and the admirable writing, deserve each their full treatment. The excellent Sophia Western and her father, the boozy, coarse, ignorant Tory squire of Jacobite

leanings, are a contrast as vivid as remarkable in their sure delineation. What delicate shades separate the hypocrisy and meanness of young Blifil from the contemptible falsehood of Thwackum and Square! Squire Allworthy is Parson Adams in another sphere, a little too conscious of his goodness to be wholly lovable, but a fine human type for all that. But it is useless to enumerate the book must be read, and the life of it lived through. And to the man who has looked into the heart of his own experiences, who has observed his fellow men and women with sympathy, it will come as one of the sanest and the wisest of all our novels. It is not a theology, still less a psychology, but it is a "criticism of life" more potent, more penetrating, and more truthful than all the satires of all the Popes who ever wrote. It is the real epic of the eighteenth century.

5 Fielding's Later Life —A falling-off in vitality is easily to be perceived in Fielding's last novel, *Amelia*, which appeared in 1751. But a very great deal could be forgiven for the beautiful full-length portrait which Fielding has given us of the devoted wife in his heroine Amelia. No sweeter or truer woman adorns the pages of fiction, in spite of the interest which anon her husband, and anon the eccentric duellist, Major Bath, and anon Mrs Bennet, the distressed widow, arouse in us, she — Amelia, the simple, unobtrusive, guileless wife, to whom constancy and self-sacrifice are mere matters of course—dominates the book. Even Sophia Western is eclipsed by Amelia's simple beauty of heart and mind. A few scenes of the lowest comedy in one sense disfigure the book, but they do not soil the purity and the tenderness of its main attraction. The humourist's dower of the highest pathos fell liberally on Fielding when he was writing this book.

The experiences of Fielding as a barrister and a

magistrate for Middlesex were not without their effect on *Amelia*, which is in several ways a strong attack upon our prison system. It is difficult to say which disgusts us most—the hapless crew of unfortunates who are huddled together in the prison yard, or the repulsive gaolers who are permitted to fleece their victims without mercy. The incompetence of our law-administrators peers through several of the novels, not one of them fails to show that their author took his duties as a magistrate with a humanity new and little understood. His interest in the criminal and the fallen was not, however, the morbid interest of Defoe. It was the interest of intense sympathy. In his history of the convict, *Jonathan Wild*, he has carried this interest into a work of art which must always be regarded as among his most perfectly wrought works. Wild's story is that of a man whose life was never hampered by the questionings of humanity or conscience. It is the epic of pure crime. Wild was a genius, and devoted his matchless powers to obtaining the sovereignty among criminals. In Fielding's mind, he is the incarnation of that character which grows from great cleverness and force of intellect when these are not accompanied by a similar gift of the humane and the spiritual. The book is full of dark deeds, as we might suppose, they are told with the same grim ruthlessness as Wild used in doing them, they give the author opportunities for the exercise of his gifts of irony, of satiric humour, of vivid characterisation—for probing vices other than those of convicts—above all, for that insight into the essentials of human nature which was Fielding's rarest possession. The *History of Jonathan Wild the Great* does not dignify crime or criminals, but it brings their actual nature before us with a sharpness and intensity that places it easily first in its class.

The father of the English novel died comparatively

young, and in no very affluent circumstances He went on a voyage to Lisbon in search of health, after two years of complicated pains He died and was buried far away in Portugal, almost unhonoured and unsung His life was one of very changeful weather, chiefly turbulent and stormy In *Tom Jones* we seem to see his early self—wild, headstrong, generous, repentant, often rising to nobility of thought and of soul In his *Journal of a Voyage to Lisbon*, the later Fielding shines—heart-sick, worn by sickness and struggle, patient, magnanimous Set down all his errors—of judgment, taste, sentiment, his coarseness, his tendency to throw the high light upon certain human failings when we have debited all, he remains one of the Shakespearean tribe He is a great humorist, seeing things in their proper perspective, loving all that is truly human, scorning all that is inhuman He is the literary ancestor of Dickens, who paid him a genuine hero-worship He brought common life into the sphere of art, he banished alike the imperfect and one-sided realism of Defoe, and the excessive sentimentality of Richardson, in so doing, he created the novel of manners

6 Smollett—The novel, once written, seems such an obvious and natural thing that we need not feel surprised that Fielding found many imitators Among these we can only mention here **Tobias George Smollett (1721-71)**, who had a certain idiosyncrasy of his own He was, like Fielding, a favourite with Dickens, but his special strength lies rather in the boisterous vitality of adventure than in the sympathetic delineation of human character The novel of adventure, not much hampered by laws of probability or by the demands of a fastidious psychology, received its baptism in English at his hands

Smollett's life was rich in rough experiences, which

are very fully and faithfully reflected in his novels. He was a Scotchman, a young scion of a large family. Brought up to be a doctor, and tolerably well educated, he came to London to seek his fortune in 1739. Like his hero, Roderick Random, he failed to find sufficient scope for his medical acquirements in London, and a drama which he had previously written brought him no more comfort than his proper profession had done. In half despair he accepted a position as surgeon's mate in a ship bound for the West Indies, and his experiences on board again find their reflection in the hard times and brutal treatment of his own Roderick. Smollett was present at the siege of Carthage in 1741, and stayed in the West Indies five years. The fruits of this stay the novels were to reveal. Returning to London, he threw himself into the work of literature for a livelihood. Satires he wrote, coarse and unpopular, a translation of *Don Quixote* (1755) and a *History of England* are among his hack work, and the latter at least is by no means a despicable production. But it was according to the model set by Lesage in *Gil Blas*, and under the stimulus furnished by the success of *Joseph Andrews*, that Smollett did most of his literary work.

The Adventures of Roderick Random, his first novel, came out in 1748, the year before *Tom Jones*. This book has the vividness and force of autobiography, the life and character of Roderick, and doubtless some or all of the incidents connected with him, represent Smollett's own, and they are narrated with a straightforward directness which makes them still readable. The atmosphere is not very pure, and often enough disgusting; it is, however, frequently bracing, and the laughter is real if somewhat loud. But Smollett is not Fielding. He can give life to an adventure, but not always create the illusion of reality even there, he cannot give endur-

ing life to his persons. The sailors, Tom Bowling and Jack Rattlin, are types of the breezily honest, and manly English sailor, but they, with one or two comrades in the later novels, are the only heroes of Smollett's who have a permanent place in our literary memories. Roderick is but the centrepiece for the loosely strung adventures to be hung upon; he is not realised as in life. We rise from this—perhaps the best—novel of Smollett's with no clear vision of its personages, but with our head swimming. All is noise and bustle, clashing and splashing, aimless brutalities and vulgar jokes, indecencies and inhumanities, jostle one another throughout, and we pray for a touch of refinement, a little glimpse of the tender or the noble. But we pray in vain, though Roderick has it in him to give us all of them. His love story is *nearly* nice; he is occasionally almost generous enough to be a hero. But Smollett is so essentially a man of action that he cannot for a moment allow himself to pause and think. His graphic descriptions do not tell, because they are not well placed, as the artists say.

We need not enumerate the many works of Smollett which modern taste rightly rejects as impossibly coarse. But the last flicker of his genius was as great as its first blossom. *Humphry Clinker* has charm as well as vigour, and knocks vigorously at the door of literary immortality. A certain tenderness smooths the rough and boisterous humour here and there. Several of the characters are human as well as entertaining. In short, the drivelling indecencies and the mad satire which disfigure *Peregrine Pickle* or *Sir Lancelot Greaves* are not sufficient to injure *Humphry Clinker*.

The diction of the book is always clear, the meaning always unmistakable. There are no niceties of expression, no fine shades of character, there is none of that humour which illuminates the deepest

depths of human nature But Smollett is a great tale-teller He lacked restraint, choice, delicacy, he painted in the most garish colours and knew nothing of the more sombre tones, but the spirit of romance lay hidden among his faculties, and peers forth anon in fine nature-description, anon in vivid adventure, anon in a description of storm or fight, which thrills if it does not charm His humour is like an unbroken colt, ranging often into forbidden fields, he never curbed it, or taught it to move at the command of his literary gifts, and thus we find Smollett's fun chiefly in silly accidents or in sillier practical jokes For all that, it is good to visit for a short while only the demesnes of this vigorous and whole-hearted Scotchman They are wild in parts, even dirty and repulsive, but *Roderick Random* and *Humphry Clinker* at least cannot be neglected without loss

7 **Sterne**—One of the most puzzling and most fascinating personalities among English authors here crosses our path, and, though we cannot spare much time for him, we cannot escape him **Laurence Sterne** (1713-68) was a Yorkshire clergyman, who had not the virtue of Chaucer's parson, who preached Christ's lore, but first followed it himself His mood was that of the most unholy friars, he was a rake, an epicure, a disciple of Rabelais, but whether to name him a mere mountebank or pantaloon, or to enthrone him among the great humorists of the world, is a perplexing problem In the twists and turns and tricks of his literary poses, in his obscenities, his innuendoes, his excesses of sentiment, in the incongruity between the characters of his books and the heartless selfishness of his life, the charlatan would seem to predominate But in the beauty of his diction, in the wonderful delicacy of his character-drawing, in the subtle movement of his humour, like an aroma over his most offensive

pages, he would seem to take his place by the side of Rabelais and Cervantes. It is quite certain that he was a man of attitudes, determined to attract attention—by whatever device just or unjust, he cared not. By dashes, asterisks, gaps, interjections, innuendoes, by every mechanical and every literary artifice that tortured ingenuity could suggest, he was able to defy the most acute among his readers to prophesy what was coming next, and to laugh at their clumsy failures to do so. His *Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* deals with almost everything under the sun except the life and opinions of Mr Tristram Shandy, who in fact is not born until the third volume is reached. The book rambles from one digression to another in most capricious fashion. But when we have laid it down there emerges from our memory, not a vicious disgust with the leering obscenity, the hinted improprieties, which hang like an atmosphere over it, but a gallery of most beautifully drawn portraits, a group of simply unforgettable men. If any work of equal size exists in English, which can show the equal of Mr Walter Shandy and his wife, of my Uncle Toby, Corporal Trim, Parson Yorick, and Dr Slop, we would like to know of it. The art of it is a complete mystery. It cannot be analysed or explained. It is useless to ask how it is done. The strokes are so fine, the method so subtle and so delicate, that we have only the refuge of genius for our perplexities. It is as though a dunghill were submitted to minute examination, and found to be teeming with rich and myriad jewels. Here a gleam of exquisite pathos wrings us into tears, there some extraordinary extravaganza shakes us into uncontrollable laughter. Sterne bestirs the filth again, and lo! a burst of sentiment or a gravely ironic disquisition on some recondite military question takes us by storm. And all the while, both in *Tristram Shandy* and in the *Senti-*

mental Journey, the style and language are models of pure and simple English. Sterne stepped from obscurity into the glare of a European reputation, and along with Swift he shared the kingdom in which Rabelais had ruled. He cannot vie with his master in wisdom, in range of knowledge, in true and elevated humanity. But he has delighted to show us the foibles of man exaggerated, the beautiful complexion of mankind he finds under his microscope to be a loathsome gangrene, and with an explosive laughter he has thought fit to tell us so. As in the case of Fielding and Smollett, we find much to repel us, only such as have strong intellects can tolerate the strong food which they give us, but to such as have the necessary experience and understanding, Sterne will not fail to bring a measure of interest, often pathological, but sometimes delightful also.

8 Later Developments of the Novel—After the death of the great ones, the novel fell into the hands of many minor and almost forgotten writers. But it developed along two main directions. The tale of terror and mystery, dealing with supernatural and wholly unreal themes, acquired literary distinction in the tales of **Clara Reeve** (1729-1807), and in the more thrilling stories of **Mrs Anne Radcliffe** (1764-1823). In *Vathek*, **William Beckford** (1773-1818) wrote one of our finest stories of the supernatural. But the tone of these romances is artificial, and we can only await the arrival of Sir Walter Scott with some impatience.

The other direction of taste lay in the extension of Fielding's method to lighter themes.

The novel of domestic life, of gentle satire on the little customs, the fussy nothings of every day, arose in the quiet work of **Fanny Burney** (1752-1840), afterwards *Madame D'Arblay*. She was the daughter of a well-known writer and teacher of music, and

was compelled to do her writing in secret on account of the hostility of her stepmother. But she was a devourer of novels, and quite early used her lively talent and powers of observation in the composition of her first novel, *Evelina*, which appeared in 1778. It had an instantaneous success, and brought her the ready commendation of Johnson and Burke. The great dictator, in fact, found in the letters of "little Burney" many reminiscences of Richardson, and hailed her as that great man's successor.

We have not space to analyse the story of *Evelina*. Its object, as its author said in her preface, was "to draw characters from nature, though not from life, and to mark the manners of the times." "For this purpose, a young female, educated in the most secluded retirement, makes at the age of seventeen her first appearance upon the great and busy stage of life", and the world is pictured as in the mind of this young lady. On the whole, it is very entertaining. The satire is not, of course, very deep or poignant, but the observation is real, and has the *naïveté* of innocence, the dialogue is sprightly and attracting, and Miss Burney is quite a lively writer, with whom we may pass a very amiable and pleasant hour. She becomes older and heavier in *Cecilia* (1782), then becomes an assistant-keeper of Queen Charlotte's robes, under the fat and unendurable Madame Schwellenborg, an episode which did much to sterilise her talent, but provided a little spice for her diary in later years. Next she married, in 1793, a French emigrant named General D'Arblay, after which came two almost forgotten novels, snowed-up under their heavy and cumbrous diction. *Camilla* (1796) and *The Wanderer* (1814) were written in response to the *res angusta domus*, but, dealing with a range of characters outside their author's experience, they demanded a knowledge and an

imaginative power which she had not. Her success came when the vivacity and pertness of girlhood were in her, and her method required a gaiety and lightness which at forty a woman cannot call upon.

CHAPTER XIV

Johnson and his Circle

Johnson's Life and Character Essays and *Rasselas* His Poems The *Dictionary* *Lives of the Poets* Boswell Goldsmith his Life and Adventures *The Citizen of the World* *The Vicar of Wakefield* Poems Comedies Sheridan his Plays Sheridan and Politics Burke as Statesman, his Speeches, his Attitude to the French Revolution, his *Letter to a Noble Lord*, his Genius and Influence Junius Sir Joshua Reynolds Garrick The Johnsonian Club

Samuel Johnson (1709-84)

- 1738 *London*
- 1744 *Life of Savage*
- 1749 *Vanity of Human Wishes.*
- 1750-52 *The Rambler*
- 1755 *The Dictionary*
- 1758-60 *The Idler*
- 1759 *Rasselas*
- 1774 *Journey to the Hebrides*
- 1779-81 *Lives of the Poets*
- 1791 Boswell's *Life of Johnson*

Oliver Goldsmith (1728-74)

- 1762 *The Citizen of the World*
- 1764 *The Traveller*
- 1766 *The Vicar of Wakefield*
- 1768 *The Good Natur'd Man*
- 1770. *The Deserted Village*
- 1773 *She Stoops to Conquer*

1764 Foundation of the Johnsonian Club,

Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1752-1816)

- 1774 *The Rivals*
- 1777 *The School for Scandal*
- 1779 *The Critic*

Edmund Burke (1729-97)

- 1756 *Essay on the Sublime and Beautiful*
- 1765 Becomes Secretary to Lord Rockingham
- 1769 *Present State of the Nation*
- 1770 *Thoughts on Present Discontents*
- 1774-75 *American Speeches*
- 1782 Becomes Paymaster of the Forces
- 1788 Impeachment of Warren Hastings
- 1790 *Reflections on the French Revolution*
- 1796 *Letter to a Noble Lord*
- 1797 *Letters on A Regicide Peace*

1 Johnson's Character and Life—The novel has carried us away too far, it is necessary to turn back to the middle of the eighteenth century, and to make the acquaintance of the ponderous but manly figure of Dr Sam Johnson, as he shambles defiantly and heavily through the tale of English Literature. Albert an inseparable part of the life of his time, belonging to the London of George the Second and George the Third, he stalks along in rugged independence, doing what other men were doing—play-writing, essaying, satirising in couplets—but doing it in his own way, with a rotund and pompous rhetoric which can only be described as Johnsesque No figure less prepossessing at first glance will enter these pages. He was corpulent, bloated, scarred with scrofula, he walked with an ungainly shuffle, in which his body swayed in a horrible manner, and his breathing was, to say it gently, somewhat sonorous, he was gruff in manner, and often crushing in conversation—Ursa Major his enemies called him, he was often morosely silent, self-absorbed, voracious in his feeding, often unwise in his drinking. His temper was that of the despot, whose word was as peremptory and as final as a nod of the gods. Yet no dictator was ever more absolute in his sway, or more idolised by those who gladly submitted to it. And among the worshippers to whom he was the hero were men like Goldsmith, Burke, David Garrick, and Sir Joshua Reynolds His character, though it had the roughness, had also the grandeur of the time-scarred crags. "Clear your mind of cant," was his essential maxim ✓ An honest and clear-headed vigour characterised his thoughts, robust common-sense was the basis of his prejudices, a simple, unaffected piety, and a stern, almost stoical, moral code, constituted his religion. Men always admire the strong man whom no buffets of fate or circumstance can overthrow, and Sam Johnson's life is

merely a record of difficulties met and overcome. The friend of every genuine man, the kindly angel of hope to many a literary tyro, the downright, straight-souled giant who crushed like an avalanche the pretentious and the finicking, he wrote comparatively little that is of permanent value, but was responsible as a personal force for very much more in the work of other men than will ever be measured. Prejudices and defects he had. His Toryism was of the most crusted and unbending type. His common-sense shut out from him the true vision of the poems of Milton and of Gray. He did not rise above the conception of literature which was rife in the eighteenth century. He placed Richardson far above Fielding, because of his more severe morality, thinking that all worthy art should tend to edification. ✓ He had no sentiment, no spirituality, no feeling for nature: to him one green field was like another green field, and called for no raptures. ✓ The only study worth the name was that of man, as seen in London streets and taverns. But even in his failings we see always the stern and often lurid glow of a sincerity, a manliness, an independence, which are always honourable.

It was only by the sheer force of his character that he was able to exist in the world at all, much less to become one of the most noteworthy figures in it. His first fifty years were steeped in hardship, but the bitterest cry that was ever allowed to escape him was a paraphrase of two satires of Juvenal, and the sombre resignation of his one novel, *Rasselas*, was the temper of his life. Like Imlac, in this tale, he had found life a state in which much was to be endured and little to be enjoyed. The son of a Lichfield stationer, he managed somehow to go to Oxford, but on account of poverty could not finish his career there. He went into the world with a mind well-stocked with the fruits of industrious reading as his

sole equipment. He tried the teaching and the journalistic professions, David Garrick was one of his pupils, but could not redeem Johnson's school from miserable financial failure. A heavy and unreadable tragedy, called *Irene*, was probably in part written before he went to London in 1737. In the great city, that despairing refuge of the destitute, Johnson toiled and lived we do not know how. He became a hack-writer, a parliamentary reporter—he has given us some of the speeches of the great Pitt,—a poet, a biographer. But he remained poor, walking the streets oftentimes in dire distress, but retaining in spite of all a brave and tender heart. His experiences made his *manners* rough, but *he* remains to our memory a noble and dignified figure, disdaining our pity and scorning all allowances for circumstances or misfortune.

In 1759 Johnson's mother died, and in one week he wrote the whole of *Rasselas*, for which he obtained enough to pay for her funeral. But such straits as these were not to be much longer endured. A well-earned pension of £300 a year rewarded him for his services to the Tory cause, and, if Lord Bute did nothing else that is worth recording, let this stand to his credit. Henceforth Johnson entered into his empire. His leisure was filled with receiving the homage of his literary subjects and in scattering benevolence in all directions. His biographer gives us instance after instance of his kindliness of heart, of his eagerness to help the distressed, of his simple and unassumed piety. Those last years of his, when Boswell knew him best, produced little literary work, but they sparkled with wit and wisdom, and shone with the radiance of a mind which had profited to the full by its experiences. Boswell's book is, as we shall learn, the greatest biography we have, it is Johnson who makes it great, and Boswell had the skill and the sense to allow his hero to dominate his

pages Johnson died in 1784, living to give encouragement to Fanny Burney and to Crabbe. But with him passed away the eighteenth century tone in literature. The triumph of romance was at hand. The deities of common-sense and clearness were soon to be dethroned. It was well that the manliest, the wisest, the noblest follower of the traditions of Addison and Pope should not see their eclipse.

2 Essays and *Rasselas*—Johnson was essentially an essayist. Of really great creative work he was constitutionally incapable. His wisdom was ever with him, but it required the stimulus of society or the pressure of circumstances to force it into expression. And so we find him at his best in his talk at the meetings of the famous club. The pages of Boswell contain, indeed, the best of Johnson, because it is seen under the circumstances most favourable to him. Nevertheless, the pompous diction of many of his essays, in *The Rambler* (1750-52) and in *The Idler* (1758-60), hides much fine morality and a fund of most excellent sense. These essays are heavy, but it does not follow that they are bad on that account. They have not the iridescence of the *Spectator*, nor the naïve humanity of Steele, but they have their own merits, and reveal the solid worth of one of our most heroic literary spirits. They are characteristic of the man who wrote them in their own way, which is a Latin rather than an English way, they express what Johnson wished to say with vigour and sonorous force. His use of long and full-sounding words was his way of observing the dignity of writing, it was affected, but only in the sense that all conscious style is affected, and, though we can regret for the sake of Johnson's popularity that the essays of *The Rambler* are not touched with a lighter spirit, we must not deny that in the matter of the essays their author is treading on congenial ground.

Rasselas is called a novel. But it is much better described as a long essay, or as a series of essays, on the vanity of human wishes. When one remembers how it was written, it is hard to suppress an excessive admiration for it, but without this sentimental aid, *Rasselas* is a book worthy of the best English traditions. It is a brave book, as well as a wise and a righteous. Though it is the mournful elegy of a pessimist to whom life appeared very grey indeed, it is rich in those qualities which sustain men in adversity or on the brink of despair, it seriously grapples with the harshest realities of the world, exposes their worst and most malignant, and then bequeaths to us a dower of faith and hope which at least reconciles us to what we cannot prevent. No doubt the book is lacking in sunshine, in humour, in the more refined beauties, yet we are ready to overlook this, to disencumber ourselves of the strongly ~~Latin~~ Latin ~~diction~~, to put up with this or that failing, because the book is Johnson himself, a singularly manly, robust, and genuine personality. We find that our copy of *Rasselas* contains many underlined passages which express some truth of morality, in the perfectly balanced prose that Latinisms, be they never so numerous, could not really injure. Sentences like these contain precepts that are trite enough, but who can deny them a dignity of diction which gives them authority?

Integrity without knowledge is weak and useless, and knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful.

Be not too hasty to trust or to admire the teachers of morality: they discourse like angels, but they live like men.

He who has nothing external that can divert him, must find pleasure in his own thoughts, and must conceive himself what he is not, for who is pleased with what he is?

The life that is devoted to knowledge passes silently away, and is very little diversified by events. To talk in public, to think in solitude, to read and to hear, to inquire and answer inquiries, is the business of a scholar. He wanders about the

world without pomp or terror, and is neither known nor valued but by men like himself

This last passage is Imlac's character of himself, and stands for Johnson's ideal of his own life. Imlac is the guide of Rasselas, the young prince of Abyssinia, through the world. Born and nurtured in the happy valley, away from all pains and all cares, Rasselas and his sister with the ardour of youth yearn for a more varied if a more strenuous and uncertain life. In the company of the sage Imlac, a poet-philosopher, they escape from the valley, and wander from country to country, visiting cities and states, and seeing human life in its hundred various aspects. They find something deficient everywhere. Neither statesman nor hermit nor astronomer can satisfy their yearning, even in regard to the philosopher who lived according to Nature, Rasselas finds, with sad irony, that he was "one of the sages, whom he should understand less as he heard him longer", and Imlac is ever a grave, correcting presence, coldly expounding his favourite text that very few people live by choice. Finally Rasselas returns to the happy valley, and he and his sister henceforth agree to cultivate happiness in their own corner of the world. "Vanity of vanities! all is vanity," is the "conclusion wherein nothing is concluded."

Such was Johnson's view of life, a miserable prospect in which very few live by choice. There is more evil than good in the world, but he could give no reason, never attempted to give a reason, for such a state of things, except "the unsearchable will of the Supreme Being." The same problem had appeared before the mind of Voltaire, and he answered it with scepticism, but in a careless age, not given to religion, Johnson upheld a temper of the simplest piety, he ascribed all that seemed awry

to the deficiencies of his own character or understanding, and lived a martyr to his sense of sin, a Churchman with the heart of the Methodists, whom he valued too little ✓ *Rasselas* must therefore be taken as an autobiography of his own soul, showing with cold sincerity how he passed from youthful ardour to the calm acquiescence in life as it is, which characterised his middle age

3 Johnson's Poems—Ten years before *Rasselas* appeared, Johnson had uttered his gloomy prophecy in the *Vanity of Human Wishes* (1749), and eleven years earlier, *London* had introduced Johnson to the world as a poet. These didactic satires are merely moral essays in verse on the lines of Pope, and in this case Jack is almost as good as his master. Both are excellent pieces of rhetoric, *London*, according to Boswell, is "one of the noblest productions in the language, both for sentiment and expression", and the *Vanity of Human Wishes*, on the same authority, is "as high an effort of ethic poetry as any language can show". If we grant the current view of poetry, then Johnson's verses are indeed among the best. They are clear, correct, resonant, and dignified. *London*, in fact, though the work of an unknown author, received as much attention as Pope's imitations of Horace, published in the same year, 1738, and Pope himself gave quite generous praise to the new poet. But, if we look for those qualities of imagination which heighten the workings of the intellect and the movings of the heart, into the impassioned language of such poetry as Shelley's, or even Gray's, we shall find these exercises of Johnson's very difficult to accept. They are forceful, even brilliant at times, occasionally almost lyric in their personal note, and quite free of the merely spiteful snap which rings from Pope's moral satires, and this, in spite of the fact that they imitate Juvenal, and not the more genial Horace, who inspired Pope. But

they have no lofty flights, only eloquence, and never the poet's winged words

London nevertheless must be read Paraphrasing the third satire of Juvenal, Johnson paints the corrupt state of London as it was towards the end of Walpole's rule

London, the needy villain's gen'ral home,
The common sewer of Paris and of Rome

London, overun with supple parasites from Fiance;
London, where worth is not understood, and
only the sycophant can win a place, London, "where
looks are merchandise, and smiles are sold", London,
where "starving merit" never finds a home, London,
the paradise of the drunken reveller, the footpad, the
gaol-bird it is a dismal and a bitter theme to him
who was struggling so desperately in its squalid
haunts Grim and direct is the picture surely some
sympathy must go out to the wounded soul which
could utter such a bitter cry as this

By numbers here from shame or censure free
All crimes are safe, but hated poverty
This, only this, the rigid law pursues,
This, only this, provokes the snarling muse
The sober trader at a tatter'd cloak
Wakes from a dream, and labours for a joke,
With brisker air the silken courtiers gaze,
And turn the varied taunt a thousand ways
Of all the griefs that harass the distress'd,
Sure the most bitter is a scornful jest,
Fate never wounds more deep the gen'rous heart,
Than when a blockhead's insult points the dart

This is the voice, not of a man carried off by
elysian visions, nor of one who has leisure to play
with the Graces of Parnassus, but of one who has
endured much, and who *knows* by conscious experi-
ence, that

Slow rises worth, by poverty depress'd.

And as such, *London* is more valuable than most of the contemporary satire—it is a living document, chanting one of the saddest passages of the past, and, in spite of changed tastes, of Tory prejudices against Walpole and against France—in spite, too, of its bitterness and its excess—it must stand, as Juvenal's livid picture of decadent Rome stands, for all time.

The *Vanity of Human Wishes* is a more general satire than *London*, and it is superior to that poem in range and depth of thought, and in its constructive meaning. Your mind may wander, says Johnson, from China to Peru, you may observe all customs of all peoples, you may try statesmen or kings, scholars or soldiers, the result is all one—you will see men everywhere shunning fancied ills and chasing airy good. Examples from present and past will throng you. Wolsey, Charles the Twelfth, Bacon, Galileo, Marlborough, Swift—to select only a few of Johnson's—all point the same moral and adorn the same tale. Do you desire wealth, power, friends, old age? It is useless, desire them not—they are worthless when they are obtained.

Where then shall Hope and Fear their objects find?
Must dull Suspense corrupt the stagnant mind?
Must helpless man, in ignorance sedate,
Roll darkling down the torrent of his fate?
Must no dislike alarm, no wishes rise,
No cries invoke the mercies of the skies?

Cease to question—trust in God, and do your best!
Let your prayers not rise in complaints or querulous questionings,

Pour forth thy fervours for a healthful mind,
Obedient passions, and a will resign'd.

And so—again to work!—to battle bitterly and bravely for a mean livelihood. Gray completed his *Elegy* in 1749. He too found the world vain and

unsatisfactory But he was a scholar and a gentleman, uncompelled to strive more fortunate than the poverty-ridden hack, how much in the real sense was he more unfortunate! Johnson never understood Gray The *Vanity of Human Wishes* will tell us why, and help us to forgive Johnson

4 *Johnson's Dictionary*—We have not yet mentioned the task upon which our author spent several years of his life—a task which was surely one of the most heroic ever undertaken by a man in Johnson's position The *Dictionary* is, of course, not literature, but its making was so creditable to Johnson, and meant so much indirectly to literary men, that we cannot forget it As a dictionary, it has suffered the fate of the pioneer it has been supplanted by others which have explored his territory with fuller and more scientific equipment To mention only one thing the science of philology was quite unknown to Johnson, and consequently he did not understand the importance or interest which lies in the history of words, and, also consequently, such derivations as he does attempt are often childishly wrong But, even allowing its defects and its incompleteness, the *Dictionary* is a marvellous work Its definitions are characterised almost always by lucidity and sound sense, its illustrative quotations have been very valuable to later lexicographers, and, although we cannot with Miss Pinkerton adore it as our first classic, we can even now dip into it profitably, obtaining that stimulus and delight which the company of a robust and active intellect always arouses

It is, however, not for its own sake that the *Dictionary* and its date, 1755, are important in literary annals Its publication sounded the death-knell of patronage in literature Lord Chesterfield was a famous and really an able statesman, a cultivated man of the world, whose letters to his son

represent in its most polished form the worldly wisdom of the eighteenth century, a self-appointed but generally recognised judge and patron of new literature. To him Johnson applied for help, and went so far as to dedicate the scheme of his dictionary to the patron. But this involved so much of servility, so great a sacrifice of independence and self-respect, that Johnson threw Chesterfield's promises to the winds, and proceeded in the lonely gloom of his garret with his task. Chesterfield sneered at him, at his ungainly figure, at the uncourtly manners which knew no distinction between superiors and inferiors. But Johnson, if he knew it, was indifferent, and was rewarded by the great success of his work. Chesterfield, however, now came forward as the enthusiastic patron. Nothing was too nice or too flattering for him to say about the great achievement. Doubtless he honestly believed what he said, but Johnson wrote to him a famous letter, published later on by Boswell, which dealt the unanswerable blow to the pretensions of the patron. "Is not a patron, my Lord, one who looks with unconcern on a man struggling for life in the water, and when he has reached the ground encumbers him with help?" The letter is too long to be quoted in full here. It is a model of dignified and annihilating rebuke, in splendidly balanced and unmistakable English. The cynical man of the world, whose highest worldly philosophy was that of Bacon and Machiavelli, had not a word to say in reply. And thus it was that patronage was killed. The trumpet-call was blown to all literary men to come forth before the public in their own robes, to stand in their own strength and declare the dignity of the author's calling. Henceforth, for nearly thirty years Johnson reigned supreme among the intellectuals of the time. The position, half won by *The Rambler*, was completely stormed by the *Dictionary*.

5 *Lives of the Poets* — The years of ease, from 1762 to 1784, produced little more that can add to the doctor's fame than the *Lives of the Poets* (1779-81). These constitute, however, Johnson's most readable prose work, and are much more like his conversation than the essays in *The Rambler* or than *Rasselas*. New standards of criticism have rendered much of the matter out-of-date. No breath of the romantic spirit gave colour to Johnson's view of literature, and no exact training in the comparative values of the great literatures of other races broadened his mind into the modern catholicity of view. His lives fail especially when they have to deal with the greatest poets. Milton and Gray were especially broad stumbling-blocks to him. But on the other hand, he was particularly competent to do full justice to those men who indulged rarely in the bold flights of poetry, to intellectual poets whose theory of poetry differed little from his own. His lives of Cowley, Waller, Dryden, and Pope are all excellent. The style, while clear and lucid to a degree, is never too ornate or pompous, the sense, while common and practical, is sound and luminous, and altogether we may be glad to have by our side this antidote to much romantic gush, this delightful shower-bath of straightforward criticism. The transcendental fervour and fine spiritual insight of Coleridge, the finely trained taste of Matthew Arnold, are not there. But it is good to have justice done to the apostles of clearness by one who sympathised with their point of view.

6 *Boswell's Life of Johnson* — When all is said that can be said about Johnson's writings, it still remains, however, that he does not live in literature by them. They are the evidence of a strong and admirable personality which they only half reveal, and it is by his personality that Johnson holds the affections of so many lovers of literature. More to the great *Life*

by James Boswell (1740-95) than to any other cause, do we owe our conception of Sam Johnson. There he is portrayed by an adoring hero-worshipper, in all his trappings as he lived. And the picture, so evidently and artlessly truthful, is withal so noble and inspiring, that Boswell's *Life of Johnson* must be reckoned among the most sustaining and the most helpful of the world's great books.

Boswell was a young Scotchman of good family, who came up to London, presumably to study law, in 1760. He had, however, but little inclination either for the law or for study, his disposition was pleasure-loving to excess, he wished rather to make headway in society than to become Lord Chancellor. He was what is commonly called a fool, ready for any silly escapade which should give him the character of a jolly, good-natured fellow. He could not resist the spell of the wine-flask, and once scandalised Johnson by getting drunk in the company of a bishop. Weak, vain, foppish, he was his own worst enemy. No sneer could effectually snub him; the fact that people laughed at him was pleasing, and never injured his self-respect. He would blunder into any company, into any conversation, and his self-complacency was never shaken. But he was cheerful, gay, and friend-like to every one. To Johnson he gave a dog-like devotion so absolute, that he is for all time the cardinal example of the hero-worshipper. This appreciation of Johnson, which began in 1763, must be held to redeem Boswell's character somewhat, though, even here, vanity played its part: the fussy, self-important little man liked to be seen in the company of the great dictator. "Sir," said Johnson to him one day, "you have only two topics—yourself and me, I am sick of both." The examples of such rough treatment as this, which Boswell records against himself with so indifferent and innocent a sincerity, are very many, but Boswell

was not daunted. He stuck tenaciously to his quarry, treasured his sayings, kept careful notes of his wisdom, retained the memory of a hundred good stories, unconscious of the laughter of all who knew him. That a bear should lead a man, to tavern or to dinner-party, in worship or in wine, was a profound inversion of the order of nature in the eyes of the witty. It did not affect Boswell, and the fact that Johnson suspended for once his prejudice against the Scotch and their country, is a testimony that the great man in some way appreciated his queer satellite. The two went off on a journey to the Hebrides in 1773—a curious journey it must have been! At the end of it, Johnson was gracious enough to admit that Boswell had better faculties than he imagined, “more justice of discernment and more fecundity of images.” And if any one doubts Boswell’s faculties of happy observation and comment, let him read the two accounts of their journey which the two friends published, and if he does not prefer Boswell’s account to Johnson’s, he will be a strange man.

According to Macaulay, Boswell’s success as a biographer was due to his foolish and weak character. If he had not been a great fool, he would not have been a great biographer. This surely does no true justice to the author of the finest biography in all literature. It overlooks the fact that what Boswell has given us is a life-like portrait in full size and in natural colours, extenuating nothing, nor setting down aught in malice. Such a feat is a real work of art of the very highest order. A string of carefully chosen sayings, a budget of anecdotes, a collection of letters chronologically arranged—all these together do not make a biography. They may give us glimpses of the hero’s personality, but Boswell has given us something much more than this: he has made Johnson the best known and one of the most

respected of all literary men. And it was not by keeping a verbatim report of Johnson's sayings and doings, and merely reproducing them in a more or less clumsy way. It was rather by saturating himself with the Johnsonian wisdom, by knowing his hero in all his moods and with all his idiosyncrasies, as an intelligent attendant might know him, and by his real appreciation of Johnson's massive and essentially noble character. Johnson has to a large extent told his own tale, but the great man's talk is fused into a living structure, of which it is not the only element. The articulating matter is almost always admirable, both in writing and in treatment, the all-important background of the picture is, in short, as excellent as the many lines which contribute to the portrait itself. That Boswell has done this so well does not prove him an idiot, but an artist. If a certain story fits in with his design, Boswell does not reject it because it tells against his own or another's reputation, his eye was on his biography, and for the success of that he, with genuine artistic spirit, readily sacrificed anything.

Carlyle's theory of Boszy, the inspired hero-worshipper, fits the facts as much and as little as Macaulay's extreme view. Boswell did venerate Johnson, and looked up to him as a very great man. But it is a discriminating worship that he gives. He differs from Johnson often. He analyses his hero's motives and is conscious of his failings. He shows him up to us as a man of great wisdom and most shrewd judgment, of real piety and unfailing sincerity, of genuine kindness and tenderness of heart. But there is the bear also, the man of irritable and domineering temper, superstitious, prejudiced, and of large appetite. Who has given us these? Boswell has recorded all incidents which indicate character with a veracity that is as sure as the stars, he has revealed much more than he knew, perchance, by

that insight which is the secretion of his imagination, which no theories can fully explain, which is the distinguishing attribute of his genius. And this is not the work of the unsophisticated hero-worshipper, any more than it is the work of the unadulterated fool.

Yet Boswell was a fool and a hero-worshipper — an artist too. By the combination of these three, the whole Boswell emerges. Let us give the biographer the credit for his happy, unaffected, unstrained language. He has provided us one of the most entrancing books for the odd half-hours of life. No book lends itself to random dipping-in more naturally than this. There are flat and dull and gloomy pages, especially in the early part, where personal experience did not inspire or help the writer, but we rarely fail very soon to light upon something that is entertaining, stimulating, or wise. "Boswell" soon becomes one of the most fingered of all our books, one of those which never loses its freshness or its humanity, and this is due as much to the amiable if foolish biographer, as to the straight and stalwart soul of his hero.

7 Goldsmith's Life — There is another member of the Johnsonian circle who shares with Boswell the reputation of the inspired idiot. It is Oliver Goldsmith, "old Noll," who wrote while inspired some of the most exquisite English prose, but when he opened his lips talked "like poor Poll." It is the fashion, after Boswell, to dwell upon Goldsmith's blunders in manners and in speech, upon his affectations, his extravagances, and his heedless follies, and so to conceive him as one of fortune's minions who fell into success undeserving, and enjoys a fame that is as difficult to explain as Boswell's. On the other hand, Goldsmith is a sort of spoiled child in literature, the rake to whom much is forgiven, because of his sufferings and of his cheerfulness. Whatever money

he made by his writings availed nothing to save him from debtor's prisons and from absurd extravagance in living and in dress. Such misfortunes as he had—and they were many—arose from his neglect of the first axiom of happiness, that no man can expect to be happy whose expenditure exceeds his income. Improvident, careless, foolishly generous and hospitable, Goldsmith reaped the appropriate reward of his conduct—"toil, envy, want, the patron and the gaol." The world treated him badly, because he did not care for its fundamental laws. His life is a moral to all prodigal sons: we must not pity him, and cannot condemn. We can only love Oliver Goldsmith: his cheery spirit, his pathetic good nature, his genial Irish humour, as often turned against himself as against anything else, his naive and natural sincerity compel this attitude towards him, and strangle all criticism of his personality in its cradle.

Born and brought up in a far-away Irish village, Goldsmith was the son of the vicar of the parish, a poor clergyman who was

Passing rich on forty pounds a year

Such education as the humble vicar could give him, Oliver obtained, the village schoolmaster lent his aid, but the final product was a shy, awkward, and uncultured youth, a blockhead by reputation, a dull, unpromising pupil all round. At Trinity College, Dublin, he did a little better, but left at twenty-one with no prospects, and every suggestion of the ne'er-do-well in his character. His friends tried to drift him on to the sea of life; and at last we find him at Edinburgh studying medicine. Presently he crosses to the Continent, and four years of vagrant life establish in him the improvident habits of which the seeds had been already sown. He did not take kindly to the anatomy school of Leyden, but he wandered through Europe, flute in hand, penniless

and often supperless, yet on the whole received with a kindness and hospitality which gives *The Traveller* its roseate glow. The vagrant life suited him because there was no need for him to steer his course, because he was a born wanderer, and because he had a large fund of sympathy for simple humanity, which found its outlet among the Swiss peasants and the "rude Carinthian boors." His natural sweetness of disposition was only refined by his travels, his capacity to bear misfortunes cheerfully grew out of his experiences. And who needs to be told that his later literary work was far more deeply intoned with these European wanderings than with the flavour of his London life? No man less practical and less foreseeing than he ever lived, and who can wonder or regret? Take away from his life-story the *Wander-Jahre*, and the fragrance of his tale and of his writings vanishes. See him, weary, foot-sore, road-stained, near the close of day, resting on some hillside and fluting plaintively to some valley deep-glowing in the sunset, he watches the cornfields, the slender smoke-wreaths of the wooden cottages, and reflects with a sad joy upon the peacefulness and the simple happiness of the scene. And presently a rude peasant takes a fancy to his playing, soon they become friends somehow, in spite of the unseemly face pitted with smallpox and the blundering manners. The wanderer takes a share in a humble meal, sleeps in an impromptu bed, and can only repay his host with his simple music and his genial good nature. Goldsmith did not earn his living, like Edie Ochiltree, he was no more than a beggar, but the picture is not unpleasing, and it is significant of the essential goodness of Goldsmith's character that the stern, strong moralist, Sam Johnson, was one of his warmest admirers and friends.

8. *Goldsmith's Essays*.—The vagabond life, broken

by intervals when somehow or other he was able to indulge in more refined society, was ended in 1756, on the outbreak of war. Goldsmith came to London penniless, and, after failing in turn as a teacher, a chemist's assistant, and physician, he found his true vocation as a contributor to the contemporary magazines. Much of his work was mere hack-writing, but his essays in *The Bee* (1759) gave him reputation, and assured him of a comfortable livelihood. His haphazard habits reduced him often enough to dire straits, but the literary public of 1760 was not so obtuse that it could not perceive the charm of his style and of his humour. It is Goldsmith's essays that preserve the title of *The Bee*, it is his more famous essays that save Smollett's *Public Ledger* to posterity. For £100 a year Goldsmith agreed to furnish amusing papers to this well-patronised publication twice a week. These papers were afterwards collected under the title of *The Citizen of the World*.

By these charming essays Goldsmith challenges the throne of Addison. They are the supposed comments of a Chinese philosopher travelling in England with his eyes open and his wits awake. Our habits and institutions are seen through Eastern spectacles, and the criticism is both frank and humorous. The Chinese philosopher has the delightful ease and urbanity of Addison's *Spectator*. His wit is not so piercing, but his good nature and his grave moral simplicity are not so equivocal. Every phase of manners comes up for his review, and is treated with an inexhaustible kindness and patience. Not so severe nor so serious as *The Rambler*, not so lightly touched nor so ironical as the *Spectator*, *The Citizen of the World* is more childlike and more simply human than either. It is not fair to Goldsmith to ignore these charming essays—none the less wise on account of their charm. Their subjects

range from Poetry, English Liberty, Luxury, and Fortune, down to Spiders and Ladies' Trains. The humour and the freshness of the treatment shine in all alike.

9 *The Vicar of Wakefield*—In spite of the popularity of such essays as these, we find poor Goldsmith in 1764 only saved from arrest at the suit of his landlady by the fortunate intervention of Johnson, to whom he had been introduced three years before. The landlady seems to have been more enduring than most of her tribe. Items were set down on her bills at £0, 0s 0d with despairing frequency, while her debtor went out to supper at the Mitre in all the glory of his plum-coloured vest and silk stockings. The arrears frightened her at last, but she took the means which the law gave her to recover them only when she found her lodger's promises hopeless. Johnson sent him a guinea, and he bought a bottle of wine for consolation, with which Johnson found him on arriving in person a little later on. The result of the dictator's visit was that *The Vicar of Wakefield* was carried off to a publisher, who, taking Johnson's word for its value, gave him £60 down for the manuscript. Thus one of the most charming of our minor books was sold to save its author from a debtor's prison. Two years later it was printed, and the bookseller had no reason to repent of his bargain.

The literary graces of the essays are here reinforced by the perpetual presence of human beings, drawn with such skill and sympathy as to make *The Vicar of Wakefield* one of the favourite books in the English language. To Goethe it came as one of the greatest prose-idylls in all literature, and foreign critics know it better than any other English novel. Its style is so pure and clear that it is still used in foreign schools as an English prose text. It is not a novel, though it cannot be called anything else.

It has no plot, no probability, no fidelity to any rules of art or nature. As a picture of domestic life or of village life it is not successful. Yet it is still widely read both in the home and in the study, and, if we smile as we compare its artless pages with the teeming life of *Tom Jones*, or with the fine, minute heart-analysis of *Clarissa Harlowe*, we are constrained to confess that the good Dr Primrose himself has become one of our most intimate acquaintances, and one whom we would not willingly lose. There are a hundred faults in *The Vicar of Wakefield*, as Goldsmith himself knew—queer coincidences, impossible happenings, violent outrages of all human probability. We laugh heartily at the wild absurdities, but we shake hearty hands with the dear old vicar ere we part from him. To the imagination a delight, *The Vicar of Wakefield* is dissolved in a patronising laughter by the analysing mind.

Never deep nor elaborate, but touching with exquisite delicacy those mannerisms and traits which indicate the essentials of character, and setting all in a background of dreamy rustic beauty, Goldsmith has made at least his vicar live. No doubt the good man is a very near relative of the parson of Lissoy, no doubt the simple family life of the Primrose family also owed something to vague memory, and perhaps the happy conclusion gives voice to a hope that, by some magician's wand, the scattered home might be formed again in the dear old village. Smiles and tears intermingle when the pathetic and unpractical man steps into the story. The little king of his family and his village is so unfit for his dignity, yet so worthy of all the respect of his flock, that we love him and forget his foibles. His affection for his family is so real, his forgiveness of Olivia's frailty is as genuine as his consciousness of the shame it involved, his contentment and piety under undeserved suffering and disgrace have a stoical nobility

that shames us if we are tempted to laugh at the sermons to the gaol-birds, or at his reproof of his wife for her fine clothes, and with all these characteristics Dr Primrose stands out a lovable and idealised personality, philosophical in the best sense, benevolent and charitable in all his thoughts. He represents an attitude towards life which will always be honoured by those to whom goodness and simplicity of heart are dear. And it is because human nature *does* hold these to be intrinsically the valuable things in itself, that it permits *The Vicar of Wakefield* to defy with impunity the laws of art and of probability. In the vicar, Goldsmith stepped for an instant into the realm of the highest realities. Dr Primrose is not so mighty as Prometheus, nor so heroic as Achilles or Æneas, not so subtle as Hamlet, nor so spiritual as Faust, but it would be difficult to cull a character from the whole range of fiction who is more surely one of the immortal types of mankind. He is, like Job, only a sufferer, but how nobly he suffers! what a radiance his mere existence is!

The other characters of this tale need not detain us long. Of the vicar's family, we like the wanderer George none the less⁸ because he resembles his creator. In his gay, hand-to-mouth career through Europe, in his undaunted disregard of all the laws of common life, he is equally the son of Dr Primrose and of Oliver Goldsmith. Moses is very stupid and very funny. Sophia is excellent, and the contemplation of her virtues delights us as it delighted her father. Olivia is not so satisfactory, Burchell and Thornhill still less so. But though they appear and disappear with charming disregard of all verisimilitude, they have many admirably painted traits which show how sympathetically and how keenly Goldsmith observed the manners of men. But again we repeat, that the vicar himself makes the book. His patience

and tolerance, his indulgent sympathy with human infirmities and frailties, are a tonic in all ages and in all climes, it is for these that *The Vicar of Wakefield* lives

10 Goldsmith's Poems—In 1764, at the time of his arrest, Goldsmith had in his pocket an almost complete poem, and presently he dropped it into the poetic gap left by the death of Young, the idleness of Gray, and the sterility of Johnson's sober muse. *The Traveller* was planned as a didactic poem, in support of the paradox that one form of government is as good as another. It is the wanderer's address to his brother, the poor vicar at home, it is the vagrant's longing for home, set to the music of beautiful poetry. For this poem is a poem, and not an essay, as it was intended to be. It is obviously not true that governments cannot affect the happiness of the individual, though it is of course equally true that the best of all governments cannot exterminate human misery. Wherever he has travelled, Goldsmith has found happiness and misery under all skies and under all governments. Neither the humble wants of the Swiss, nor the nature charms of Italy, can wholly satisfy. Everywhere there is much to displease and much to please. Then—

The pensive exile, bending with his woe,
To stop too fearful, and too faint to go,
Casts a long look, where England's glories shine,
And bids his bosom sympathise with mine

It is useless to expect that travel will bring happiness: it is only a very small part of our happiness that depends upon the state under which we live. Fortunately, the enjoyment of this poem depends rather upon its admirable descriptions and its carefully worked diction than upon the truth of its hypotheses. We do not feel that we are reading a versified social theory, we seem rather to be viewing

a charming panorama under the guidance of a most agreeable companion

A similar impression remains after our reading of *The Deserted Village* (1770). It is not logic, but the cheery optimistic nature of the poet, that provides all the arguments for the position he advocates here. In its attack on luxury, *The Deserted Village* is passable, in its diagnosis of its causes it cannot be followed without impatience. Goldsmith gives his support to an ideal which was a happy memory of his own early impressions. Sweet Auburn was a lovely village in the days ere the craze for wealth and luxury drove its simple inhabitants into the towns. No invidious distinctions of rank crept in, when

Every rood of ground maintained its man,

nothing interfered with the innocent rustic joys, industry and simple pleasure made up the whole of life. But this paradise has gone. Instead of farms there are large parks, poverty and stagnation have displaced comfort and contentment. The villagers have gone to swell "Trade's unfeeling train." But how can this be stopped? A bold peasantry is doubtless a country's pride, but is not the exodus from the country to the city in its essence the expression of a desire for a fuller and larger life than the villages can give? The rustic life which Goldsmith advocates would perhaps be one of bodily health, but there is a higher health than this, and the poet, recalling men to ignorance and superstition, was surely opposing the real trend of nature. And our villages were not, as Crabbe's too faithful poems show, Sweet Auburns. Vice and squalor were as familiar as innocence and content. The evils attending commerce and the aggregation of men in towns are numerous—more numerous than Goldsmith knew. But the village life of the eighteenth century, with its torpor and its squalor, was no worthy ideal.

The return to nature had had its advocate in Rousseau. By the side of his passionate advocacy Goldsmith's theories are cold and artificial.

If the philosophy is superficial, however, the descriptive power shown in this poem is sufficient to redeem it from all other criticism. The scenes come into our imagination, vivid through the felicity and the sincerity with which they are painted. Goldsmith is no minute analyst of character and motive, but he is a lover of the simple and the good, a cheery observer who ignores as far as possible all that degrades human nature. The village schoolmaster, the curate "to all the country dear," the happy village evenings, "the vain, transitory splendours" which could not save the pastoral paradise—these are described in language inimitably smooth and polished, and they cannot be forgotten. Trite as is the theme of the poem, it never wearies us as it is here presented.

Now, let us remember, in this matter of style, that Goldsmith is entitled to very great credit indeed. He has avoided the tame monotony of such blank verse as Akenside patronised, he has avoided equally the monotonous jingle of the heroic couplet as Pope used it. He was no bold originator, no reformer of poetic method. But, while Churchill was giving his great talents to the fabrication of vile and violent satire, he, to whom fortune was at no time too kind, avoided all bitterness and all excess. Satire would have been no difficult matter for him, as the masterly sketches in *Retaliation* show. His good-humoured caricatures are at all events the raw material for satire, and we may be pleased on the one hand that Goldsmith did not accept the manner of the *Essay on Man*, nor cultivate the tone of the *Epistle to Arbuthnot* or *The Rosciad*, on the other. He gave us couplets which have all the smoothness of blank verse,

without the laxity which frequently accompanies the blankness. He polished his work with as much care as Pope, but he polished from it all venom and all unkindliness. His ease is the masterly ease of the man who had won perfection by hard toiling, it is at one with his genial and easy-going nature.

But, all these virtues being allowed, Goldsmith's music is not of the order to which the great poets who are also seers have accustomed us. He is, after all, imitative, not original. His matter, his manner, his method, were none of them new, though he expressed his old truths and familiar observations in a forcible and delectable way. His were the simple artifices of a simple nature, the frank imaginations of a sunny disposition, the pleasing metaphors of a generous but commonplace fancy. No breath of the oncoming romantic movement touched him. He knew no skylark flights into the regions of light and love, he had no conscious insight of spiritual or divine things. The ethereal notes that warbled from the tuneful throat of Collins are never heard in Goldsmith's poems. He was of the eighteenth century and of Johnson's circle; he gives us delight without inspiration, good nature without strenuousness, simplicity without grandeur. His genius was versatile, bright, and sound. But he is not one of the guiding forces, he is a sort of non-commissioned officer in the army of literature, carrying out the ideas of other men with thoroughness and felicity. His one novel, his essays, his poems, his comedies, would each be enough to give him fame. They will live while there are people who love simplicity and true humour, through them he contributes his modest share to the luminosity of our literature.

One more glimpse of success in another groove came to Goldsmith ere he died in 1774. His death was due to a fever, which only grew serious because

he would insist on doctoring himself, and because his mind was harassed by its load of debts. It was a sad and early death for one of whom Johnson wrote, *Nullum quod tetigit non ornavit*. He died honoured and forgiven. And though he left £2000 of debt behind him, let us too forget his frailties in the delight he has given us. The choice diction of prose and verse, the tenderly sincere pathos, the quaintly grave humour—let these be his atonement for his ill-regulated life.

11 Goldsmith's Comedies—We have still to mention the comedies, one of which is among the masterpieces of its kind. The light and licentious comedy of the early part of the century, the purer but rather namby-pamby dramas of Steele, each set fashions which died out for want of that essential harmony between author, actor, and audience that is the condition of dramatic life. Fielding wrote comedies which add nothing to his fame. A writer of farces, named Samuel Foote (1720-77), gained the ear of the public and of Johnson, David Garrick conspired with George Colman (1732-94) in successful comedies, and Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) revived the sentimental tone in a series of popular and satirical comedies. But no dramas worthy of preservation were written by any of these men. The theatres were well patronised in spite of the spread of Wesleyism, actors like Garrick presented intelligent studies of Shakespeare, and were ready to encourage any man who could write plays. Johnson's pompous tragedy, *Irene*, received a trial on the boards, but it had soon to be withdrawn.

The way was thus clear for Goldsmith when, in 1768, his first comedy, *The Good Natur'd Man*, was presented at Covent Garden Theatre. Though this did not meet with any great success, it deserved much more than it received. It was far the best comedy that had been produced for many years,

it has many funny scenes of a broadly humorous kind, which might have atoned for the weakness of its plot and the falseness of its sentiment, and the well-drawn character of Croker was enough to redeem the poverty of most of the rest, though neither Honeywood nor Jack Lofty can be dismissed as entirely uninteresting. But we need not quarrel with the theatre-goers of 1768: it is enough that, five years later, they gave an unequivocal welcome to *She Stoops to Conquer*, one of the permanent comedies in the English drama. It shares with Sheridan's *School for Scandal* the pinnacle of unvarying popularity among English comedies of manners. If it is somewhat careless, as it is certainly inartistic, in structure, that is only Goldsmith's, but for genial wit, spontaneous fun, broad and boisterous humour, it would be difficult to surpass it. It is interesting both on and off the stage. The breezy laughter which sweeps through it carries away the unwholesome bacilli of pedantic criticism. The humorously dramatic situations confound the sourest, the characters are caricatures with the stamp of life on them. It may not compete for depth or polish with Sheridan's masterpieces, to be mentioned presently, but the genuine human nature of the personages places it high out of the rut of farce. It holds among comedies a similar position to that which *The Vicar of Wakefield* holds among novels. Tony Lumpkin is the Dr Primrose of the comic stage. He relies upon and lives by his native mother-wit, just as the vicar lives by his native goodness of soul. Tony, as he sits at the "Three Pigeons" among his coarse cronies, is rather vulgar company for the over-nice among us. But, though he is a mere lout, he is not lacking in good-nature, and the true spirit of fun is in him. The idea of sending the two lovers and travellers to the mansion, where they were expected as guests, as to

an inn, where they would be waited upon by their host, was a spark from Tony's brain, and was the central motive of the piece. And we are glad at the end that the dolt who has amused us so much turns out to be wiser than the wise in a matter where common-sense alone was called upon. Tony is the life of the piece: his careless generosity and the naive simplicity of his day-to-day existence lead to comical results, but savour too much of Goldsmith's own character to leave Tony in any way contemptible.

It is, however, chiefly in the *low* comedy that Goldsmith has made his chief success, and it is this which leaves *She Stoops to Conquer* below the *School for Scandal* as a comedy. The scene in which Mr Hardcastle, the moneyed man, who is excited at the prospect of entertaining a gentleman, instructs his servants in the niceties of behaviour, Goldsmith manages excellently. But the love-scenes between Miss Hardcastle and the lover, who has come to woo her for her wealth, are not so convincing nor so true. For here, as elsewhere, Goldsmith's genius, like his character, is seen to lack strength. We are tempted by his winning treatment of the more obvious human characteristics to ask from him a deeper insight than he can give. The creator of Dr Primrose, of the Chinese philosopher, of Tony Lumpkin—the painter of Sweet Auburn—annoys us by the want of the very little which, added to the beauty, grace, and humour he gives them, would have lifted them on to the very heights of Olympus. For hearty fun and good-humoured laughter, for pleasing dialogue and amiable wit, *She Stoops to Conquer* may compare with Sheridan's best, in knowledge and depth, in the highest comic power, it cannot stand beside the *School for Scandal* for a moment.

12 Sheridan and his Plays—Richard Brinsley Sheridan (1751-1816) stands second only to the creator of Falstaff and Malvolio, among English

masters of comedy. He was an Irishman of brilliant gifts, personal and intellectual, famous as an orator and a politician as well as dramatist. His father was Thomas Sheridan, an acquaintance of Johnson's, apparently a very stolid and unimaginative person, whom Johnson snubbed in vain. The son, however, had cleverness enough for two, he was a wild Bohemian who worked, nevertheless, very hard and conscientiously, and, marrying early under romantic circumstances, he turned to the drama for support, and got *The Rivals* acted at Covent Garden in 1775.

This comedy did not reveal an entirely new type or ideal, it was simply the comedy of Congreve and Wycherley adapted to another age and to another state of society. A new standard of taste had arisen since Congreve's day, to which *The Rivals* adapted itself with advantage, but *The Rivals* is as much a picture of contemporary manners in witty dialogue as are the plays of Congreve. A carefully constructed plot with its appropriate air of mystery, an abundance of wit and glitter in the speeches, admirably drawn types of humorous personages—these are the staple of Sheridan's comedy. The plot of *The Rivals* is excellent, the complications arising from the fact that the heroine, Lydia Languish, is wooed by the poor Ensign Beverley and by the wealthy Captain Absolute. She is of a romantic turn of mind and sets her heart upon love in a cottage, but Sir Anthony Absolute has equally strong views in favour of her marriage to his son. The rivals turn out to be one and the same person, Ensign Beverley is Captain Absolute in disguise, and so, of course, all is put right at the end. The plot is well worked out, but it is the dialogue and the characterisation which make the comedy. Lydia herself and her lover are not the most interesting persons of the drama. Nor are Sir Lucius O'Trigger and Sir Anthony very far removed from the ordinary and familiar comic types. But Mrs

Malaprop is queen among those who have obtained immortality by their "derangement of epitaphs" Listen to her specific for poor Lydia's education

Observe me, Sir Anthony I would by no means wish a daughter of mine to be a progeny of learning, I don't think so much learning becomes a young woman, for instance, I would never let her meddle with Greek, or Hebrew, or algebra, or simony, or fluxions, or paradoxes, or such inflammatory branches of learning—neither would it be necessary for her to handle any of your mathematical, astronomical, diabolical instruments—But, Sir Anthony, I would send her, at nine years old, to a boarding-school, in order to learn a little ingenuity and artifice Then, sir, she should have a supercilious knowledge in accounts,—and as she grew up, I would have her instructed in geometry, that she might know something of the contagious countries,—but above all, Sir Anthony, she should be mistress of orthodoxy, that she might not mis-spell, and mis-pronounce words so shamefully as girls usually do, and likewise that she might reprehend the true meaning of what she is saying This, Sir Anthony, is what I would have a woman know,—and I don't think there is a superstitious article in it

If Shakespeare in his Dogberry, and Fielding in Mrs Slipslop, had used this device before him, who shall say that Sheridan has not brought to it a cleverness and delicacy all his own? The use of the words, progeny, contagious, supercilious, reprehend, in the above passage, only illustrates without in any sense exhausting Sheridan's skill, and the idea of Lydia's learning "ingenuity and artifice" at a ladies' school is almost sufficient of itself to make Mrs Malaprop famous for ever

Bob Acres, too, may have had ancestors in Pistol and Sir Andrew Aguecheek, but he is firmly transplanted into the eighteenth century, and his form of cowardice is all his own He does not boast "By my valour," he tells Sir Lucius, "I should like to see you fight first—I should like to see you kill him", and again, he admits "If I can't get a wife without fighting for her, by my valour! I'll live a bachelor."

He does not mind being called a coward, but he will not be called a poltroon. His share in the plot of the play is important, and his share in the humour of it more important still.

Passing by a farce and the comic opera, the *Duenna*, which made for Sheridan a considerable position in drama, we find him thriving so well as to have become part-proprietor of Drury Lane Theatre after Garrick's retirement. For some time he did nothing to make either reputation or profit, but his venture was saved by the production of his most brilliant comedy, the *School for Scandal* in 1777. The careless and too jovial habits of its author made him put off the completion of the play, so that the actors did not receive the last scenes until the last moment. "Finished at last, thank God!" Sheridan is said to have written on the last leaf of the manuscript. This may indicate what the exceedingly brilliant and witty dialogue teaches us, that the play cost even the clever Sheridan an infinity of trouble. Later in life he declared that he dare not try to write another comedy, and doubtless he found politics an easier road by which he could reach the sort of fame that he desired. At all events, we can say that the *School for Scandal* is the finest comedy of manners in English. It has all the wit of Congreve without his cynical immorality, the sentimental gush, which Goldsmith has not escaped, is absent here, and the characters are great human types, distinguished from similar types in Molière, Congreve, and Fielding by their idiosyncrasies and their situations. Sir Peter and Lady Teazle, the Surfaces, Joseph and Charles, hypocrite and rake, Sir Oliver Surface, Mr Moses, and Lady Sneerwell, are among the most familiar figures in our theatres, and as long as we can appreciate real wit and true humour, they will continue to be so.

Two years later, the last spark of drama which was

to scintillate with Sheridan's wit was produced at Drury Lane This was the *Critic* (1779), a farce in ridicule of the type of tragedy written by Richard Cumberland That dramatist was not without ability, but was morbidly vain, and sensitive to criticism A story is told of him that, when he was at Drury Lane on the first night of the *School for Scandal*, he was so disturbed by his envy that he asked his children what they could find to laugh at Sheridan heard of this, and replied, laughing, "It was ungrateful of Cumberland to have been displeased with his children for laughing at my comedy, for when I went to see his tragedy I laughed from beginning to end!" It is in this spirit that Cumberland was put into the *Critic*, under the slender disguise of Sir Fretful Plagiary, a marvellous character-sketch The pompous and irritable dramatist, who affects to care nothing for the opinions of the critics, and who goes off in a fume to write an article of anathema against the whole tribe of them, is a masterpiece of caricature

The play at whose rehearsal we are privileged to be present is the tragic story of Don Ferolo Whiskerandos and the fair Tilburina The story is of course a preposterous burlesque the running comments of Puff, the actor-author, of Dangle, the absurd critic, who always takes his cue from others, and of Sneer, who represents the views of the dramatist himself, are no less entertaining The audacious Don Whiskerandos has won the love of all the English ladies, though he is but a Spanish prisoner Among the infatuated are the nieces of Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Christopher Hatton, who along with Lord Burleigh are absurdly introduced into the play

The caricature is exquisite, and pity it is that this splendid skit was Sheridan's parting with the comic stage Later he brought out a tragedy on a promising theme, *Pizarro*, but it was a failure, and

is best forgotten. He had already entered Parliament in 1780. Soon he was to make a great name as an orator in the impeachment of Warren Hastings, but he fell into tortuous and reckless courses, which were not straightened by the Prince of Wales, to whose evil interests he devoted himself. He lost his seat in Parliament, and fell more deeply still into the mire. He died in 1816, heavily in debt. But he was buried with all the honours of Westminster Abbey. Like Goldsmith's, his character lacked the ballast of a steady life-principle. He could apply himself to a task intensely and earnestly for a time, but he preferred to be brilliant and showy before soundness and lasting fame. Recalling his three great plays, we may say of him, that he gave to politics what was meant for mankind.

18 Edmund Burke — This last remark, which is almost the dirge of Sheridan's reputation, was really made about **Edmund Burke (1729-97)**, the political writer whose devotion to a party did not quite sterilise his genius or eclipse his fame. Burke was one of the most welcome and most honoured members of the Johnsonian Club. Though the Tory prejudice of Johnson was strong and violent, he could always respect real character and real attainments, and the Whig principles of Burke did not shut him out of the dictator's high regard. "We who know Mr Burke," he said, "know that he will be one of the first men in the country." And once, when Johnson was not feeling well, he said, "That fellow calls forth all my powers. Were I to see Burke now, it would kill me." And again "Burke is an extraordinary man. His stream of mind is perpetual." And still again "Burke's talk is the ebullition of his mind. He does not talk from a desire for distinction, but because his mind is full." From these sayings we may be sure of Burke's greatness, and from the close confidence in which he was held by Lord Rockingham, we may

be sure that the Whig party valued at an equally high rate his political wisdom

The life of Burke brings us on to the ground of history so often, that we have not space for it here. He was the son of a Dublin solicitor, and had the passionate imagination and fiery loquacity of the Celt, which made him revolt from the humdrum curriculum of Trinity College and from the dry-as-dust study of the law. He came up to London in 1750, idled away a few years in quiet preparation for his life-work, wrote for periodicals, and soon attracted the attention of Johnson by his rich learning and richer conversation. His first works of any note were his *Vindication of Natural Society* (1756) and his *Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1756). Thus he made his bow to the reading world in the combined garb of philosopher and politician.

Becoming secretary to Lord Rockingham in 1765, Burke was henceforth engaged almost entirely in politics, but, as a practical statesman, he never, for some obscure reason, received a fair chance. The highest office he held was that of Paymaster-General. Yet his services to his party were of the most important kind. Was he too indiscreet, too open, too free in his language? Could he not engage in the under-hand intrigues of the mere politicians? Or was it that these latter gentry knew that they could rely upon the services of Burke without reward? Whatever may have been the cause, we have no statesman with the half of Burke's eloquence, insight, and proved wisdom who so singularly failed to attain high office. Fortunately we need not think of Burke as a statesman, or his life would be accounted a failure while he was Paymaster, he effected a few economies in the royal household—that is all.

But who can doubt that his voice had a most

potent influence over the course of affairs? Was the ardent eloquence, coloured by such a variety of fancy, wit, enthusiasm, irony, even poetic imagery, of no avail in England? The sleepy and boozy country squires could not listen to the long speeches, could not comprehend even in the vaguest way their meaning. But those speeches, and still more the writings, expressed the best temper of the nation—the temper to which the most reactionary House of Commons must eventually yield. They were adorned, not with facts merely as in Walpole's case, not with the rushing might of mere words as in Chatham's, but with a wealth of illustration and imagery very rarely found in parliamentary utterances at any time. The sentiment of history fused with a noble patriotism in all Burke's political writings, giving them dignity when they are most polemical, endowing ephemeral incidents with permanent meaning. The *Thoughts on Present Discontents* (1770) does not deal merely with present discontents. It is a masterly exposition of the fundamental principles of British rule, inspired with disgust at the corrupt and unconstitutional government of the "king's friends". It is an eager plea for economy and for reform, a bold and crushing attack upon a venal House of Commons. The only way to popular honours and popular trusts lay through the favour of the court, when Burke deemed the highest government to be that which is "broad-based upon the people's will". Not that he was in any sense a democrat, but his aristocracy was such as should stand for all that was best in the life of the nation. The Whig party under Lord Rockingham seemed to him to represent such an aristocracy, a choice band of ministers, eager to sweep away abuses and to govern generally in the spirit of a constitution whose forms were based equally upon the two eternal pillars of justice and freedom. His close analysis of the political position must have convinced the reason

as much as its eloquence must have moved the heart of all who read it

But no! Burke could not shake the crass complacency of George the Third nor convince the selfish stupidity of those "friends" who stood to gain under his arbitrary rule. The American War placed the fool's cap upon the blind and corrupt system which Burke had attacked in the *Thoughts*. The eloquent speeches which it is our stimulus to read now were delivered in vain. Perhaps they were not well delivered. Burke's voice seems to have been loud but unpleasant, his gestures equally objectionable, and he seems to have been deficient in the superficial brilliance and verve which makes oratory strong in its immediate appeal. And it is difficult at all times to absorb spoken wisdom in any volume. The passion and the wit, the full analysis of the very root of the whole matter, the sure instinct with which he enters into the position of the colonists these, so convincing to read, may well have been dry in the hearing. But again and again Burke thundered the same doctrine. Every custom, every law, every national prejudice, every constitutional usage, is connected with the past by so many roots, and balanced in so delicate a poise in the changing present, that attempts to injure or eradicate one of them by force was a mischievous and insane absurdity, the consequences might well be a ruin that no man could foresee, and no prudent statesman could help in such a work. Let us conciliate America, he cried. You have probed into one of their most sensitive parts, the end will be disaster, complete and utter. You cannot exterminate from this colony its freedom, its English love of liberty. Are you prepared, for the sake of a paltry tax, to sacrifice the affection, the lives, the liberties of your own fellow-countrymen?

The argument was pitched in too high a key. Lord North and his royal master blundered serenely

on to the very doom which Burke had foretold Fox and one or two others saw, however, the greatness of the speeches Fox, indeed, urged all members of Parliament to have the *Speech on Conciliation* by heart. It is surely the sanest and best antidote to a fulsome national pride, to that violent "jingoism" which sees in conquest and in war the only glories of a nation. "The natural effect of fidelity, clemency, kindness in governors, is peace, good-will, order, and esteem in the governed" that is the essence of Burke's American speeches, and we may congratulate ourselves that on the whole the lesson has been learned and well used by British statesmen.

It is noteworthy that during the next ten or fifteen years, while Burke was dealing, in a manner beyond all reproach, with contemporary events, his own popularity did not stand high. Neither his party in Parliament nor the country as a whole understood him. He lost his seat at Bristol in 1780, in spite of a fine speech to the electors, and he only obtained a minor office when his party came to power at the end of the war. The year 1785 saw the marvellous speech on the Nabob of Arcot's debts, which contains that fine piece of rhetoric describing the devastation of the Carnatic by Hyder Ali, but which is more remarkable for the masterly summary of financial and administrative matters, as intricate as, in Burke's hands, they are interesting. In 1788 he led the impeachment of Warren Hastings in a famous speech, of which Fanny Burney has left us a lively impression. With the court prejudice in favour of Hastings, the novelist recounts how the mere recital of the facts against him made his case seem hopelessly lost, but how the arts of the orator—his passion, his personal animus, his political bias—led him into unfairness and excess, and redressed the balance in her mind. But in this impeachment Burke again gave voice to the nation's conscience, and pleaded for law and

justice against corruption and arbitrary tyranny And again, Burke has been justified by events it has not been by the rough and unscrupulous methods of our pioneer empire-makers that the greatness and happiness of India have been built Hastings was acquitted in 1795, but the battle for good government was won, and the orator had not spoken altogether in vain The work of fourteen years bore a sound fruit at the end

14 Burke's *Reflections on the French Revolution.*—Meanwhile, however, Burke, with his *Reflections on the French Revolution* (1790), had become the most influential Englishman of his time We must remember that the first impulse of Englishmen was to sympathise with the Revolution Some saw in it the means of weakening our inveterate national enemy irretrievably, others were in hearty unison with its fundamental ideals concerning the rights of man and the freedom of the people With neither one side nor the other would Burke permit the least parley The English constitution, worked by a Whig aristocracy, was in his view the last and the best thing in matters of government that the world had known And its strength lay in the fact that it had developed slowly and surely from the time of Magna Charta onward, without sudden starts and changes The welfare and the security of the people are bound up with the traditions, customs, and laws which form its constitution Snap these suddenly, and the forces of anarchy, injustice, and unbridled violence are at once let loose These views Burke urged with a vehement and pungent enthusiasm, in the first portion of the *Reflections*, and it is quite obvious that the man who holds them can have no sort of sympathy with the methods or the motives of the Revolution The man of ideas in politics used all his eloquence and all his experience to show that men who sought to bring new and different ideas sud-

denly into government were anathema in all well-ordered societies

The effect of this book was immense. It made England hostile to the Revolution, the lives of supporters of its principles—of such men as the amiable and learned Dr Priestley—unsafe, and, as event followed event in kindly support of Burke's prophecies, the Conservatism of the English people erected its obstinate bristles and did not withdraw them for a generation. In spite of this, however, Burke was proved wrong. Democracy, in defiance of traitors to its spirit, is the destined conqueror. Burke's vision did not extend far enough: he did not see the healthy France which was to rise from the surgical operation to which the corrupt France had to submit. Can any one deny that the final result of the Revolution, to France, to the world, has been good? Tom Paine, in his uncouth way, saw something that Burke did not see. The majesty of the constitution is much—its dignity and the reverence due to it are important—but far more to the future are the majesty of a people, the dignity and the reverence due to that. The history of a nation is much more the history of a people than of institutions, however venerable. To save a people, neither throne, nor constitution, nor any vested right must be spared. Forgetting thus the human element involved, heeding too keenly the woes of Marie Antoinette and too little the sufferings of thousands of half-starved wretches whose woes were due to the misgovernment which he would support rather than endure a revolution, Burke has nevertheless made the best defence that true Conservatism has to offer. Here, with exuberant eloquence, with unalloyed sincerity, with an almost poetic speech in places, all the possible evils of democracy—anarchy, mob-law, immorality, socialism, unprincipled demagogues, military despotism reigns of terror, uncertainty, insecurity of

property—goad the philosophic statesman into his most famous but by no means his best book. Fine language and many fine ideas there must be in anything of Burke's, and these are more than a compensation to the impartial or thoughtful reader for his bitter and wrong-headed opposition to the principles of democratic government.

Charged with changing his views, Burke justly claimed that he was only applying the same principle of continuity to French politics as he had used in his American politics. His *Appeal from the New to the Old Whigs* (1791) and his scurrilous *Letters on a Regicide Peace* (1797) enforced his position still further, and helped to rivet England into an attitude of reactionary opposition to France. But they do not add to his present reputation. He retired from Parliament in 1793, and his last years were spent in domestic and financial adversity. He had lived for many years in grandiose style at Beaconsfield Park, and it is a mystery how he managed to keep up his large establishment and his sumptuous entertainments. He was more than prodigal, and at last was ready to accept a large pension in order to pay his debts. This pension was attacked by the Duke of Bedford, who could well taunt Burke with forsaking his own principles. But Burke's answer, in the *Letter to a noble Lord* (1796), is a masterpiece of sarcasm and invective, and left the Duke, as well it might, speechless. The death of his son Richard plunged him into melancholy, deepened by the destruction of his hopes of a peerage. Retiring to Beaconsfield, he closed his life in a pathetic calm, dying of a painful internal disease in 1797.

Our greatest orator needs no Boswell to adorn his fame. We may readily find faults in him—faults of temper, arrogance, verbosity, lack of sympathy. But his intellectual grandeur, the moral fervour which he introduced into politics, the pregnant wisdom that

went to form his worst writings —these unite to make him clearly the most luminous of the satellites of Johnson. There is something massive as well as something ornate in Burke, and, just as Johnson's pomposity counts for nothing in comparison with his great sincerity, so the violence of Burke's eloquence is lost in its grave and earnest grandeur.

15 Junius—During his lifetime Burke was mistaken for Junius, the anonymous author of a series of some seventy letters which were printed in the *Public Advertiser* from 1769 to 1772. The same circumstances as tempted Burke to write his *Thoughts on Present Discontents* provoked the scurrilous rancour of the unknown Junius. In the minute knowledge of the Government which he shows, and in the fierce personality of his attacks upon the king and his ministers, Junius reveals himself to be at least a man in high position. But he was certainly not Burke. Burke's violence and personalities are atoned for by the fervour and the deep wisdom underlying them, take away from Junius his glitter, the spice of the personal attacks—and nothing remains. A rancorous cleverness cannot now pass for political wisdom.

16 The Johnsonian Club—One of Burke's greatest friends was **Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-92)**, who represented the claims of art in the famous club. The *Discourses* which Sir Joshua delivered as President of the Royal Academy show that the great painter had studied something much more than the technique of his art, and had learned to express himself in English prose with more than common force. The discourses owe much to the stimulating conversations with Burke, to his great knowledge and enthusiasm, but we must not withdraw from Reynolds the merit due to his well-read and widely interested mind. **David Garrick (1717-79)** was another famous member of the great literary circle who left a deep impression

upon the minds of his contemporaries His original plays do not entitle him to much consideration from us, but as an actor, as a man, he was great enough to demand the respect of both Johnson and Burke

The doings of these great men, and their sayings, the doings of the Beauclercs, Langtons, Thrales, and many other friends of theirs who have no other claim on us, the meetings with men like Gibbon, Paoli, and a hundred others—are they not all related with Boswellian fidelity in the pages of Johnson's admiring satellite? We peep into the suppers at this or that tavern, pry into the discussions, sit with all the rest at the feet of the dictator Even Burke, with all his powers of talk and wit, was silent when Johnson chose to talk "It is enough for me to have rung the bell for him," he said once, when some one complained that Johnson had monopolised the evening's discussion The admiration which the stalwart Whig gave to the uncompromising Tory—in whose mind the first Whig was the devil—and the genuine respect with which it was returned, are among the most pleasing personal episodes in literature But it may be that each saw that the division between them was of the narrowest As Mr John Morley, in his excellent *Life of Burke*, has said "This striking pair were the two complements of a single noble and solid type, holding tenaciously, in a century of dissolvent speculation, to the best ideas of a society that was slowly passing" They stand in literature like the venerable oaks in a large park long may they live! In an age which knew not democracy, nor romance, nor science, these two held up examples of noble character and of intellectual dignity, to show that the old order was not ignoble

CHAPTER XV

Prose of the Eighteenth Century

Philosophy Berkeley and Idealism, Hume and Scepticism, Defenders of Christianity, Law's *Serious Call*, Butler's *Analogy*, Paley **History** Hume, Robertson, Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* *Belles Lettres* Chesterfield, Horace Walpole **Science**. Gilbert White, Adam Smith, the *Wealth of Nations*

- 1710 Berkeley's *Principles of Human Knowledge*
- 1729 Law's *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life*
- 1736 Butler's *Analogy of Religion*
- 1737 Hume's *Treatise on Human Nature*
- 1744 Berkeley's *Sins*
- 1757 Hume's *Natural History of Religion*
- 1754-63 Hume's *History of England*
- 1759 Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments*
- 1769 Robertson's *Charles the Fifth*
- 1776 Adam Smith's *Wealth of Nations*
- 1776-88 Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*
- 1789 White's *Letters from Selborne*
- 1794 Paley's *Evidences of Christianity*

1. Philosophy Berkeley—We have written about the prose and poetry of the eighteenth century to no effect if we have not produced the conviction that it was predominantly of an intellectual kind. Now, the highest poetry is or should be a product of the imagination rather than the intellect, and it is in this dogma that we find the reason why Pope, Swift, and Johnson are not in the highest rank of poets. But prose is the instrument of other things than

satire or topical essay. It is the language of philosophy, of theology, of history, of science, of man's deepest reasonings, of his explorations into the facts of things. Even our poets had, as we saw in the *Essay on Man*, attacked the problem of man's place in the world—a problem of a purely intellectual or philosophical nature, they had tried to solve it in versified reasoning instead of illuminate it by poetic insight. The eighteenth century, however, produced more solid work than this, it was a time of speculation, of clear and hard thinking, and the result was a number of epoch-making works in all departments of thought.

In very many ways the influence of Locke had been very great. His cold and unimpassioned reasoning, his wide knowledge and clear-headedness, caught every thoughtful mind. He had endeavoured to reveal to us the laws of the mind, and to make us understand the conditions of true knowledge. These are indispensable preliminaries in the foundation of a world-philosophy. What value can we set upon our knowledge? Are our judgments reliable? Do they stand for eternal and certain truths? Is, for instance, the law of gravitation an absolute fact of the world? In answer to such queries as these, Locke would reply that all our knowledge comes to us through the senses, all our experience is of sensations merely, ideas or images of things in the mind, and memories and combinations of these, constitute our only sure knowledge. What do I know about the pen with which I write? It is blue, it is round, it is hard, and so forth. it has certain qualities, blueness, roundness, hardness, of which my senses inform me, and the combination of these constitutes what I call a pen. There is in my mind an idea compounded of several sensations to which I give the name *pen*. But what is the pen? Is it merely this fusion of sensations? Does it exist *only* in the mind? Or is there a real

basis of the sensations, a substance of which the ideas are more or less imperfect copies, an actual pen, in short, which exists altogether apart from me or my mind? This is one of the root-questions of philosophy. Common-sense at once says, "the matter is not worth discussing" of course there is a pen, independent of your senses or mine." Some philosophers have in this followed the lead of common-sense. Locke admitted the necessity of a material basis for phenomena, but declared that we could never know anything about it. Other philosophers have been *dualists*, and have found two realities in the universe—Matter and Spirit—the one to originate and the other to perceive sensations. And finally, there have been pure *monists*, who have taught either that the activity of the mind is but a complex property of Matter (*materialists*), or that Spirit or Mind is the only reality, and Matter but a false inference from sensations (*idealists*).

Now, the eighteenth century produced philosophers of all these schools, but the materialists were of no great importance, and can receive no treatment here. Locke was only a half-hearted dualist, and we need not be surprised that he was soon followed by a bold and uncompromising idealist. This was **George Berkeley** (1684-1753), who happens to be a fine writer as well as a fascinating philosopher. An Irishman, he was educated at Kilkenny, following Congreve and Swift, and at Trinity College, Dublin, his career was brilliant. As a man he was the Euphues of Plato—handsome, courtly, urbane, learned, unassuming, an enthusiast but not a bore, in no respect the grim philosopher of our youthful imaginations. He was quite romantic, too. He went to live in Rhode Island in 1724, resigning a valuable deanery to do so, there he spent his fortune in founding a university and in an attempt to Christianise the Indians.

He cleared the ground for his great works by a

preliminary *Essay towards a New Theory of Vision* (1709), which is as interesting as it is novel and now untenable. In 1710 came his *Principles of Human Knowledge*, which contains his first exposition of his theory of idealism. Like Locke, Berkeley was a lover of knowledge, and a seeker of truth for its own sake. Unlike Locke, Berkeley could write in a style which, in its admirable harmony between dignity and clearness, is a model prose, he can thus be read by everyone who is willing to think, and who can enjoy the lucid expression of high thoughts. The same ideas are even more charmingly expounded in a dialogue in the manner of Plato, called *Hylas and Philonous* (1713). His theory made him famous, and his personality caused him to retain his fame. Pope, Addison, Swift, Walpole, George the Second, were all attracted by him and respected him. Pope praised! Walpole promised financial aid to the Rhode Island scheme. George the Second made him Bishop of Cloyne in 1734, and insisted on his retaining his bishopric when he wished to retire to Oxford in 1752. While he was in America, Berkeley wrote his *Alciphron* (1732), seven dialogues, in which he attacks certain anti-Christian writers like Shaftesbury. Here he extended his idealist doctrine, to prove the existence of a personal God in the universe and to establish the rationality of faith. Much occupied in discussion and controversy, he found time for the consideration of important social questions. An epidemic of fever and famine swept through his diocese in 1739, and turned his mind on to the question of remedies. With a fanatic's enthusiasm he commenced to preach the virtues of tar-water as a universal remedy, his last important book, *Siris* (1744), is devoted to a metaphysical discussion of his favourite panacea. The supposed virtues of tar-water lead to interesting meditations upon the presence of a universal and omnipresent

healing power in nature, with an extraordinary subtlety and charm Berkeley takes us into his ideal regions, and the book is much more poetic than scientific in its nature

No summary that we can make here would do justice to the stimulating value of Berkeley's writings. They are almost the poetic essence of thought. The ideal theory may be right, or not right—it is certainly not refuted by your knocking your head against a wall. Berkeley's exposition of it calls for the best weapons in our intellectual armoury, and leaves us to rejoice like the swordsman who has had a keen fight with a keen adversary. It was an invaluable contribution to the growth of thought, an attempt to solve "the riddle of the universe," as bold as it was fertile in example to coming philosophers. We cannot disprove it. We cannot escape from its logic—we cannot *prove* the existence of matter as a substratum of our sensations. We cannot overcome Berkeley with common-sense. We can only overcome Berkeley with his own weapons. The philosopher soon came who was to kill Berkeley's theory with a *reductio ad absurdum*. But in so doing he killed philosophy. Yet even though this is the dismal end of his speculations, Berkeley must be read as a charming writer for the pure joy of the intellectual exercise. In *Hylas and Philonous* and in *Siris*, a reader may see in very agreeable disguise two of the most serious and most worthy fruits of the century of common-sense.

2 Hume—It was David Hume (1711-76) who carried Berkeley's theory to its logical issue. Berkeley wrote in the hope that he would by his idealism be able to controvert the deists and other unbelievers. Hume directed his idealism into pure scepticism. As a writer, Hume cannot be compared with Berkeley, his style in philosophy is dry, clear, and cold, the language of pure reason. As a man, he

was kindly and genially cynical, patient and tolerant, sceptical, but without the violence of his French sceptical friends. No more modest scholar ever lived than he. His autobiography is as unimpassioned and unbiassed as his essays. One of the very greatest thinkers of his time, he was profoundly convinced of the littleness of man's knowledge. To him what man could know was as nothing in comparison with what he could not know. In philosophy he was deeper than Berkeley, and was not influenced by any prejudice for or against Christianity. He was a disciple of pure truth, and was eager chiefly to advance knowledge of those things which are of service to men.

Hume was a Scotchman, and was a living retort to Johnson's prejudiced abuse of all those who were born north of the Tweed. Like many more, he owed nothing to his formal education. He went to France in 1734, and there wrote his remarkable *Treatise on Human Nature*, at the age of twenty-six (1737). This was unheeded, but he followed it with a volume of *Essays, Moral and Political* (1742), which received sufficient attention to lose for their author the professorship of philosophy at Edinburgh University two years later. As secretary to the British Ambassador at Vienna, Hume had useful opportunities of studying the ways of princes and diplomatists, he returned to Edinburgh as librarian to the Faculty of Advocates, where he assimilated the materials for his *History* (1754-63). His *Natural History of Religion* (1757) was his last philosophical work. It completed the exposition of his philosophy by extending his scepticism to the miraculous in religion.

The quality of Hume's philosophical writings which most strikes us is their modernness. The spirit of his work is that of the modern scientific investigator, who does not concern himself with ultimate problems.

or with final causes Berkeley had declared that Matter was a delusion, a false inference from sensation, Hume accepted this, and added with irresistible logic that mind was equally delusive and its existence arbitrarily assumed. To the idealists, Matter was only a collection of sense-impressions, to the sceptic, Mind also had no real existence—it was but a succession of sensations and ideas. You cannot prove the reality of either Matter or Mind, take away sensations, and what knowledge could you have of either?

Thus philosophy is brought into a dilemma. Either it resolves the world into sensations, or it must abandon its pretensions and retire from a task which it cannot solve. Hume's scepticism means this last. The end of philosophy is a doubt of our personal existence and of the reality of the external world equally—which is absurd. Therefore let us abandon metaphysics and turn to physics. Let us cease to seek for final causes and be content with learning the sequence of phenomena in the world of the senses. This is the point of view chosen by men of science like Professor Huxley. They extend their scepticism into all things preternatural. They do not deny the existence of a deity as a power behind the phenomena of the world. They only say that man can know nothing about the essence of God: they are agnostics, and Hume was their parent. To them, as to Hume, the knowledge that is valuable to mankind is scientific knowledge only, that which is based upon sensations, and their orderly grouping. Anything further than this is a subjective matter of individual faith.

Although his tendency is thus seen to be destructive of the dearest beliefs of the human race, we must not be blind to the impartiality, the modesty, the crystal clearness of all Hume's thoughts. "Our business here is not to know all things, but those

which concern our conduct," Locke had written in language which might have been Hume's. Hume's essays, whether they deal with morals, with politics, with religion, or with philosophy, all lead to the right understanding of their subjects and to the improvement and enlargement of knowledge. Hume may be uninspiring and unimaginative, his theory of determinism, like his theory of cause and effect, may be hopelessly wrong, but his reasoning is always worth following, and difficult to answer. The atmosphere of the intellect is fragrant here with hard thinking, and, indeed, no better intellectual exercise can be prescribed than a vigorous imaginary discussion with the shade of Hume. He strips philosophy of its verbiage, of the excrescences which passed for knowledge with certain minds. He destroys at the same time its halo and its fascination. He has none of Berkeley's warmth, because he has not his faith. He was not an atheist. "The whole frame of nature bespeaks an Intelligent Author, and no rational inquirer can, after serious reflection, suspend his belief a moment with regard to the primary principles of genuine Theism and Religion,"—he wrote in the *Natural History of Religion*. But he concludes that "the whole" is a riddle, an enigma, an inexplicable mystery. Doubt, uncertainty, suspense of judgment, appear the only result of our most accurate scrutiny." We are glad to escape from the cold serenity of this lofty state of suspended judgment. We turn to the warmer pages of Berkeley, and fall with relief into the arms of the transcendentalism of Kant and Hegel. Yet Hume expresses the prevalent scepticism of the eighteenth century in its highest and completest form, and he must be treated with our very greatest respect as the clearest of our philosophical thinkers.

3 The Defenders of Religion—Those who attempted to disturb the complacency of the early

deists, such as Toland and Tindal, fall into two classes. There were those who appealed to the reason, and attempted to answer their opponents on their own ground. On the other hand, there were the evangelists, who appealed straight to the heart and ignored the reason entirely. For them conscience was the determining factor in religious matters. Of the latter class it will be sufficient to mention two. **William Law** (1686-1761) was a devout mystic who became a man of letters in spite of himself. Though a scholar, he had a large dower of the Puritan spirit. He preached much, and wrote much, and practised what he preached. Out of the mass of his work one immortal emerges. This is the *Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729), an excellent literary expression of religious enthusiasm, rich in pure meditation, in earnest piety, and in vivid satirical portraits as poignant as Bunyan's. It was much admired by **John Wesley** (1703-91), whose *Journal* (1739 *et seq.*) is a business-like and downright record of his spiritual moods. These moods are exalted with the fervent piety which made Wesley the dominant religious figure of his century. The energy, the organising genius, the contempt of the insincere and affected, which gave Wesley such a following, are not unworthily reflected in the fermenting vigour of his writings. Wesley did more to keep Christianity alive in England than all the rational apologists put together.

Yet among these are two worthy names whose works have inspired many sad examination papers. **Joseph Butler** (1692-1752) and **William Paley** (1743-1805) belong to opposite ends of the century, but both were pillars of the Church, and both attempted to grapple rationally with the same problem. Butler's apology, made in the *Analogy of Religion* (1736), is the more effective of the two, and is not unreadable as literature. One of the problems with

which the earlier deists had made much ado was that of the origin of evil, and its continued existence in a world ruled by a good and just God. Butler took the same ground as Pope took in his *Essay on Man*. He argued from the imperfection of human knowledge and of the human reason. Just as we find much in nature that is difficult to interpret, just as our reason does not enable us to explain a hundred defects or deficiencies in nature—so we have to be content with a like ignorance in religious matters. The difficulties of the Christian religion are matched by many similar and parallel difficulties in nature. This argument from analogy—a very unsafe one in general—is carried out in a cold and precise diction which makes the book rather hard reading. But the trouble spent on Butler's *Analogy* will be well spent. It is a piece of honest thinking, in no way warped by passion or kindled into rhetoric, without the charm of Berkeley's more elaborate apologies and without the ruthless penetration of Hume, but the best piece of pure theological literature in an age that was unusually prolific of such. Along with some fine sermons, it elevates Bishop Butler into the rank of a philosophical theologian. Paley's *Horæ Paulinæ* (1790) and his more famous *Evidences of Christianity* (1794) cannot be dignified so highly. His statement of his case is lucid and artful, but his style has no other attractions than these. As arguments against Hume, Paley's reasonings are weak enough, but they put the machine-argument for the existence of a creator with considerable force, and against the deists argue the probability and rationality of a revelation such as the Christian contends for. But, as in Butler, there is no appeal to the heart, and Law's *Serious Call* must be reckoned a far more valuable defence of Christianity than a hundred treatises of Paley's kind.

4 History Hume and Robertson—The appearance of theological polemics in literature has not often done credit either to literature or to theology. Sectarian and quasi-philosophical discussions are apt to become mere abuse or to accumulate into vast accretions of heavy verbiage. History has the same kind of tendency. The bare chronicle of facts and the partisan's exposition of his favourite theories seemed to be the Scylla and Charybdis between which the historian could not safely steer. The conception of history as a vast drama with an exciting plot, rich in thrilling situations and incidents, glowing with life in innumerable aspects, had not been grasped until the eighteenth century. Gibbon was the first English historian to work out in practice such an idea. The continuity of history is as sure as the continuity of nature—nothing happens *per saltum*—even the greatest men are creatures of their surroundings, and the great historian is he who can set the actors of history in their suitable background and can present the moving panorama of events as a living and growing drama. A combination of great knowledge, great skill in narrative, and vivid imaginative power, with an impartial and sympathetic judgment, is required for this—a combination denied to all but the very greatest, inasmuch as it calls for the qualities of the poet, the statesman, the soldier, the philosopher, the man of science—all to be condensed in one small human brain.

Hume at least was able to make history attractive. The history of England which he wrote between 1754 and 1763 has of late been thrown too much in the shadow of his philosophy, but, while it makes no pretence to the accurate and certain research which the nineteenth century historians brought to their work, it is a dignified and sober account of the chief features of English history down to the English

Revolution In style it is clear, without redundancy or ornament, in manner it is calm and measured, on the whole, in judgment it is sometimes at fault, but often quite modern Hume did not pore deeply into dusty documents, but his reflections are very often suggestive, and atone by their general sanity for their lack of depth The work of a mind like Hume's cannot be altogether negligible, even when it has been supplanted by others Yet Hume lacked a very important historical qualification He was not interested in the history of a people so much as in the narrative of events His mind was, strangely enough, strongly biassed against all popular movements He is Charles the First's real advocate in history He had no democratic ideals, he supported the prerogative of the monarch with the ardour of a bishop who believed in the divine right of kings In spite of his bias, however, Hume has made his chapters on James the First and Charles the First the fullest and the best in his book They at least should be read, if only as the clearly reasoned summary of the Devil's Advocate against the Parliament

A truer historian than Hume, though not so interesting a writer, was Hume's friend and fellow-countryman, **William Robertson** (1721-93) He was as keen a Whig as Hume was a Tory, a staunch Presbyterian, but a tolerant one, of sound personal character, real literary ambition, and great industry He was chief of Edinburgh University, and by his histories he gave both himself and his university a continental reputation In 1758 he published his *History of Scotland*, but this is rather ponderous, and deserves some of Dr Johnson's scathing criticism "Robertson is like a man who has packed gold in wool the wool takes up more room than the gold" A far better history, full of valuable facts and genial reflection, is the *History of the Reign of Charles the Fifth* (1769) This book is written in the sonorous

and often effective prose which Robertson based upon the style of Johnson. It exhibits a power of generalising upon many facts which throws its author in advance of his time, and prepared the way for Gibbon. But in spite of the industry with which its author got up his facts, and in spite of some interesting descriptions, the work is monotonous. The excuse which Johnson once gave to Boswell does not serve Robertson in the tyrannous star-chamber of literary criticism. "if Robertson's style be faulty, he owes it to me, that is, having too many words, and those too big ones." Yet Robertson was an admirable man, and with some of Hume's verve he might have become a great instead of only a considerable historian. For he had the spirit of the historian, his imagination, his knowledge, his patience, his wide sympathies. He lacked only depth, and an individual style.

5 **Gibbon**—With only a mention of the vigorous account of English History done by Smollett, and of the clear compendium compiled by Goldsmith—works which at least served to popularise the history of our country—we come upon the greatest of English historians. The name of **Edward Gibbon** (1737-94) will stand along with those of Thucydides and Tacitus as the world's masters of history. Gibbon was a Cockney—that is, he was born at Putney, and from the first he was a sickly and delicate child. His early life had only one hint of the great scholar in it. He was inordinately fond of reading, and devoured everything that he could get. He wasted time at school, at Westminster his experiences were bitter, and at Oxford he again wasted nearly two years. Becoming a Roman Catholic after reading Bossuet at Magdalen, he was compelled to leave, and was sent by his father to a Protestant tutor at Lausanne. This tutor was a scholar of the most erudite and broad-minded type,

and under him Gibbon's mind took the temper and ambition of the historian. He became acquainted with the writings of Pascal and with the personality of Voltaire; the result was an abandonment of Roman Catholicism, and a fall into a sceptical indifference to religion which remained with him to the end. He wrote an essay on the study of literature in French in 1758, but returned to England, acted as Captain of the Hampshire Militia for some three years, entered Parliament, and was rewarded for his silent and unquestioning votes in that assembly by a comfortable sinecure worth £750 a year. He travelled much in France and Italy, and obtained knowledge which was invaluable to him later on. Devoting himself to study, reading all that could be read upon his subject, he gave the public in 1776 the first volume of his *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*. Two further volumes came in 1781, and the last three were completed at Lausanne by 1787.

This one work was the only work of its author's life. To the preparation for it he gave thirty-five years, to its performance the best industry of twenty-five more. It was during a visit to Rome in 1764 that Gibbon, musing among the ruins of the Capitol, conceived the idea of writing the history of the fall of the great city. Other subjects had attracted him, but this was one of epic grandeur and interest, and swallowed most of the others in its wide, sweeping range. No nobler or more heroic task was ever undertaken than this. For what was the subject? It was the slow ruin of the great Roman empire, the tragic rotting of one of man's noblest achievements, the submergence of a civilisation in a sea-flood of barbarism. It is a terrible, thrilling spectacle. Our vision extends from the first years of the empire, when the weeds of decay, the empire's evil inheritance, are already springing up, right on until the neglected garden is turned topsy-turvy by Goth and Hun,

Lombard, Frank and Moor We see the infant empire, well-behaved, but already showing signs of temper in Tiberius and Nero, grow into a vigorous prime under Trajan, and into a dignified manhood under the Antonines But already the foes are at the gate Christianity is set, the barbarians are on the fringes of the vast dominions, Commodus commences to reign. It is here that the *Decline and Fall* really begins After a masterly summary of the doings of the first two centuries, we plunge into the turbulent confusion of the third The canvas is crowded with conflicts and conspiracies, emperors rise, and are hurled to ruin with merciless regularity, but we are never permitted to lose our way In Caledonia or Persia, in Dacia or in Africa, our guide is sure Good emperors and bad emperors come before us and are introduced to us with equal impartiality Severus, Elagabalus, Caracalla, the Gordians, with their old Roman virtues, matched against the barbarous Maximin, the unhappy Valerian, the stern and successful Aurelian, and the wonderful queen of Palmyra, his enemy, the prudent Diocletian, and the great Constantine, in whose very triumphs we are permitted to see with tragic irony the certain fore-warning of Rome's ultimate ruin such are the men whose characters are the leaven in the fermenting mass of material which stands for the history of the years from 180 to 323 This first book of the tale is always reckoned the weakest of the six, but it is in our opinion a masterly treatment of most difficult materials

Constantine was the first Christian emperor, and the historian here pauses to survey the growth of Christianity, which went on hand in hand with the ruin of the political power of the Empire The two chapters in which he does this are the weakest of the book Gibbon was not sympathetic towards Christianity, and took much too low a view of the character

of the early Christians In dealing with the attitude of emperors like Trajan, M Aurelius, Decius, and Diocletian towards the Christians, he is the admirable and quite impartial historian, but in accounting for the great devotion of the early Christians to their faith, he was rather the critic and the cynic He found excuses for Trajan, but he had no conception, apparently, of the nature of the attachment which held the Christians to the sublime personality of Jesus A historian, even if he be a sceptic, cannot be excused when he tacitly argues that the noble principles and lofty hopes of the Gospels appeal only to the discontented, the ignorant, and the vicious This lapse of Gibbon's is, however, only momentary Passing away from the origins, he becomes again the calm and unbiassed historian His accounts of Cyprian, of the Arian controversy, of St Athanasius, of the great Councils of the Church, of the attempt of Julian to restore the old religion, of Gregory the Great, of the iconoclastic controversy, stand beside his other studies in history as monuments of dignified and impartial narrative "Just as the simple-hearted emotions of God-fearing men were a puzzle and an irritation to him, so he was completely at home in exposing the intrigues of courtly bishops and in the metaphysics of theological controversy"¹

The remaining five books of the *Decline and Fall*, taken together, are, when allowance has been made for one or two broad defects, as near perfection as historical narrative can be brought In the vivid presentation of the external and spectacular sides of history, Gibbon will probably never be surpassed. Julian, Alaric, Attila, Justinian, Belisarius—the man of action generally—caught Gibbon's imagination, and he has firmly impressed them upon ours His account of Mahomet and of the slow triumph of the

¹ J Cotter Morrison *Gibbon*, in the English Men of Letters Series

Arabs vies with his account of the Crusades in its extraordinary interest and in its freedom from everything that is unessential. If Charlemagne is not seen in his true perspective, he is almost the only prominent personage to whom justice has not been done. The description of campaigns is always remarkably clear and vigorous. The schemings of ambitious popes and ministers are followed out with a quiet irony and sure lucidity that show the author's delight in his task. The topography is wonderfully correct; visitors to Rome and to Constantinople constantly vouch for this. In short, events are brought before the mind as we cannot doubt they occurred, they are set in their true background, and animated with a colour and warmth which make them live. The *Decline and Fall* is a work of art as well as a history, the story of the years from 323 to 1453, of the death of the old and the birth of the new, of the complex death-agonies stamped on the features of Europe at the same time as its birth-throes, is treated with an eye always directed towards the main theme—with the parts always subordinated to the whole. And the style, although pompous and ornate, and occasionally irritating, is well adapted to the matter. The well-turned periods march onward with the stately dignity of the events which they adorn.

The chief failing of the *Decline and Fall*, considered as a whole, is inherent in the author's character and aims. The inward aspect of man did not receive its true respect from him, and so he was blind to many undercurrent forces which profoundly influenced events. The spectacle of history is so thrilling to him, that he does not pause to consider what may lie behind. He rarely seeks to condense the teaching of events into some pregnant generalisation which throws light upon them all. He is lacking, too, in moral enthusiasm. He can describe a crusade, but

he cannot enter into the feelings of a crusader. When Burke said that Gibbon's brain could easily be stored unnoticed in some odd corner of Johnson's, his mind was directed to this defect. Gibbon took the contemporary French and cynical view of human nature. He drowned himself, as it were, in his great task. He did not study human nature; he studied events in which human beings took part as actors in a moving spectacle. So we need not think of Gibbon himself—the pompous, fussy, rotund cynic, cold-hearted and erudite, the typical scholar, laboriously making himself master of many dirty heaps of dry-as-dust documents, plodding with unwavering patience through the dreariest of dreary annals, and fusing them into the stately and monumental whole which constituted his life's work. We think only of the work—of the history—which was written so thoroughly that it cannot be wholly superseded, and so skilfully that it will always take high rank in the literature of the world.

6 *Belles-Lettres* — Gibbon wrote a volume of personal memoirs, which has value as a revelation of his personal character, and which shows especially the littleness of his cynical vision when the history of Rome was not the topic. English literature is not rich in such confessions, our writers have on the whole risen above the vanity of recording every trivial incident of their lives and every little tale that has amused them. Nor is our language rich in the productions of the dilettante or the cultivated virtuoso. We cannot produce an English La Rochefoucauld or Mme de Sévigné. But there were men in the eighteenth century who were essentially men of the world, and expressed what they had to say in fastidious and carefully written letters. There is **Lord Chesterfield** (1694-1773), who received Johnson's castigation on the completion of his dictionary. He was a successful politician, a cultured diplomatist, and

a man of fashion His letters to his son are models of careful composition They teach a worldly wisdom not altogether ignoble, in sentences cold, polished, and elegant In the age of Robert Walpole we may forgive Chesterfield for his insistence on good manners and good breeding In a Parliament dominated by boozy squires, the man to whom self-control and self-respect in speech meant much did not play an entirely useless part Chesterfield's maxims do not inculcate a morality, but they touch the weaknesses of human nature and show his ill-adapted son how to avoid them in himself and as they affect him in others To us he seems to pay overmuch attention to the details of deportment, that is largely because the end he aimed at has been achieved He wished man's external conduct as expressed in his manners to be harmonious with the development of his mind All excess, all exaggerated emotion of whatever kind, was to him the great abomination

A shallower although more brilliant nature was that of **Horace Walpole (1717-97)**, youngest son of the great statesman As if to atone for the shortcomings of his father, he stands out in literature as the embodiment of up-to-date culture He became a member of Parliament, and received from his father a sinecure which enabled him to cultivate his varied tastes at leisure He travelled and read, affected the study of antiquities, and attained to some real knowledge of mediæval things, was a connoisseur in art and letters, lived a gay life at the opera, at the gaming-table, at Vauxhall, and at masquerades, and in the midst of all wrote to Sir Horace Mann the brilliant letters which are among the best in our own or any literature.

In these letters, and in his memoirs of the last years of the reign of George the Second, Walpole has given us a glittering picture of the London of the

time The letters, as such, lack the naïve and unstudied charm of Cowper's the writer is clearly very careful how he writes, very anxious to appear clever and witty—has quite obviously the pose of the man of fashion But their brilliance and their value cannot be gainsaid They reveal a personality interesting and interested It is not the highest things that attract him, but we may well pause astonished at the multitude of lesser things to which he has given the dazzle of life Society gossip may be made valuable by human touches and by just observation, and all that can be done in this respect is done in the letters of Horace Walpole They do not elevate or stimulate us towards any worthy view of life, but they entertain us if we do not take too much at once, and show us that merely fashionable society may alter its formalities, but does not change its essence after the lapse of more than a century For the rest, he linked the early part of the century to the later part As a man of the town to whom nature had no special meaning, as a lover of wit and antithesis—of the sparkle of words—he is at one with Pope, in his taste for Gothic art and for mediæval romance, he shares, however faintly, the ideals of the coming time, he only lacked its moral earnestness and sincerity

7 Science—It is a relief to leave the atmosphere of drawing-rooms, however bright and stimulating, and to turn into the pure air of a country village Selborne is a Hampshire hamlet which has become famous through the industry of another letter-writer in the person of its genial curate, **Gilbert White (1720-93)** White was a Fellow of Oriel, by no means a contemptible scholar, but essentially a lover of outdoor life He belongs to the rapidly increasing band of those who watch nature for nature's sake, and who are especially interested in the habits of animals, birds, and plants These men serve the interests of

science as the faithful chronicler serves the historian, and we cannot exaggerate the value of their work or the fine qualities—of eye and ear, of patience and self-abandonment—which they need. In White's letters on the *Natural History and Antiquities of Selborne* (1766-88), these qualities are united to an amiable, unobtrusive, and lovable personality, which union makes the book the classic of the outdoor naturalist. We have Selborne societies to encourage in other English villages such work as White so lovingly did, and even our daily newspapers have their "Nature Notes" in imitation of his method. When we look at the letters we find them undistinguished, except by their simplicity and their accuracy, they have no brilliance, no glamour of style, and in every possible respect they form a contrast with Horace Walpole's. But the atmosphere of the country is over them, and it is because the hedgerows and the birds, the insects and the sunshine are among the essential and enduring facts of our existence, that the letters which unaffectedly celebrate these will outlive the careful and well-trimmed studies of town-life. The hothouse plant obeys the caprice of fashion, the wild rose is with us always, and will always find friends in England to whom Gilbert White is a real guiding spirit.

Let us open our *Selborne* at random, and transcribe a single short passage —

Speaking of the swift, that page says, "*its drink the dew*", whereas it should be, "*it drinks on the wing*", for all the swallow kind sip their water as they sweep over the face of pools or rivers like Virgil's bees, they drink flying—"flumina summa libant". In this method of drinking, perhaps this genus may be peculiar. Of the sedge-bird, be pleased to say, it sings most part of the night, its notes are hurrying, but not unpleasant, and imitative of several birds, as the sparrow, swallow, skylark. When it happens to be silent in the night, by throwing a stone or clod into the bushes where it sits you immediately set it a-singing, or, in other words, though it

slumbers sometimes, yet, as soon as it is awakened, it reassumes its song

How admirable this is—how one wishes to have been the kindly author's companion in some of his bird rambles ! For it is the essence of Gilbert White that he loved the birds, and, altogether apart from the gay world, enjoyed his love of nature, in simple communications with two congenial friends

But science has sterner aspects, which began to attract the strong minds of the eighteenth century. The era of experiment was beginning, the method of Bacon and Locke was applied in several new directions. The experiments of Black on heat, those of Priestley on oxygen, those of Cavendish on air and water—to mention no others—led the way for great generalisations, which gave birth to the sciences of physics and chemistry. The atomic theory of Dalton, the wave-theory of light definitely demonstrated by Thomas Young, the beginnings of true geology in the writings of Hutton and William Smith, show that English minds were no less active than those of men on the Continent, in inductive speculation. But these men were specialists in science, and their writings have not that distinction of style which converts them into literature. One new science, however, brought forth a great book, the strenuous work of one man went far to establish the science of political economy.

Adam Smith (1723-90) was a countryman and friend of Hume, who, after a desultory education at Oxford, settled down at Glasgow as professor of logic in 1750. Transferred two years later to the chair of moral philosophy, he brought forth the first fruits of his studies in 1759 in the *Theory of Moral Sentiments*. This book deserves the high praise which it received from Burke as a most valuable contribution to ethics, and in considering the man, Adam Smith, it should be given no less weight than the *Wealth of Nations*.

It discusses man from the moral and social side, while the more famous work discusses him in his economic aspect. In the moral sphere, man's success, as measured by his happiness, depends, he thinks, on his possession of the two poles of virtue—benevolence and prudence. Peace of mind is the one criterion of happiness, and that is possible only to the man who is in sympathy with his fellows. All the maxims of all the philosophers cannot atone for one unjust or ungenerous act. We are to apply to ourselves the same criticism of our own conduct as we should apply to the same conduct in an outsider; we are to act towards ourselves as an impartial spectator would do. This is not the whole truth, but, for all that, Smith's work is still a stimulating one, imbued with the impartial spirit of science.

For thirty years Smith meditated his greater work; he spent at least twelve in writing it. During those years he went to the Continent as travelling tutor to the Duke of Buccleuch's son, and saw Voltaire and the French economists. In the leisurely enjoyment of the duke's pension he accumulated the materials for his work, at the same time as Gibbon was plodding through his great task. We see in Smith another Darwin, patient, unimpassioned, zealous only for the great truth which he was to disclose to men. He found the "science" of political economy as Darwin found biology and Newton astronomy—a turbulent imbricchio of discrete facts. He reduced the facts to order and system; economics ceased from his time to be a mere chaos; the foundations of a growing science were laid. Montesquieu and Turgot in France had done much before Adam Smith to interpret the connection between man and his environment, but Smith, by basing his work upon the acknowledged facts of man's industrial history, based it upon a permanent foundation.

The *Wealth of Nations*, which appeared in 1776, is

one of those books which it is impossible to condense without injury. It is so rich in wise comment and observation, so pregnant of suggestion, that one may always open it and read with the certainty of finding something fresh in it. We may have no claim whatever to be considered political economists, but we can all appreciate the calm and lucid exposition of industrial facts as a great mind saw them. Adam Smith has made such abstruse subjects as the connection between wages and rent, the "laws" of supply and demand, the true prices of commodities, the principles of taxation, and the like, almost fascinating, and always stimulating. We are not surprised that a statesman with the younger Pitt's insight and financial genius should have been captivated by Smith's exposition of the relation between taxation, debt, and peace. Obvious to modern statesmen, these principles required the impetus of a work of genius to carry them forward in the eighteenth century.

Acknowledgment of Smith's greatness, however, does not commit anyone to the support of his views as a whole. Science is everlastingly moving, and the theories of to-day are fortunate if they do more than form the nucleus of those of to-morrow. In regard to the crucial point in Adam Smith's theory, we may well ask critically to-day whether the operations of men can be worked out like the movements of stars or the evolution of rocks. Is man but an economic animal—a blind victim of economic forces—a slave to laws of supply and demand? Is it true to say that the essential fact of man's nature is his desire to look after his own interests? Does not the moral factor enter into the industrial problem? Is *Laissez-faire* the final doctrine of nations in regard to trade? Cannot the nation in its corporate capacity interfere with wages, with the movement of labour, with the inflow and outflow of commodities? To Adam Smith, Free Trade in its broadest sense was the

lodestar of economics, all interference with free interchange of wealth, all disturbance of free competition between trader and trader, between worker and worker, was equivalent to an interference with the laws of gravitation. The *Wealth of Nations* provokes many questions such as those which we have hinted, and no serious student of our modern social and industrial questions, difficult and urgent as these are, can afford to neglect what Adam Smith has to say. New facts and new points of view have not put the *Wealth of Nations* yet out of date.

Adam Smith suggests one other remark which may serve to conclude this chapter. He advocates reform of taxation, but it is in the same constitutional spirit as Burke's when he too advocates economic reform. He is a Whig, and no Radical. He is satisfied with things as they are, and only wishes to remove excrescences on a most desirable system. Our great writers, indeed, show no forewarnings of the coming Revolution. If Gibbon attacked Christianity, it was not, as in Voltaire's case, under the goad of a present religious problem which clamoured for solution. England had no Rousseau, and Adam Smith was not a statesman like Turgot. The French were clearly apprehensive of problems which were not among the dreams of our students of politics: they were rushing far ahead of our more sober thinkers. And so in Germany we find a nation more responsive to ideas than our own. In Lessing, Goethe, Schiller, and Kant the influences of Shakespeare, of *Ossian*, of Rousseau, of Shaftesbury and Hume, ripened into a readier fruit than here at home. Thus we may claim that, while our prose contains such masterpieces as those of Gibbon, of Hume, and of Adam Smith—solid contributions to the world's thought—it all lacks the inspiration of that wide sympathy with man as man which it is the defect of Whiggism to overlook. While the French writers of

genius were leading the men of France along the wild road to freedom, ours were laboriously erecting such world-wide monuments of England's more practical genius as the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* and the *Wealth of Nations*

On this note the eighteenth century ends. It was essentially an age of prose, and the years 1780-1800 were to witness a revolt from many of its dominant ideals. But we must not underrate its value to literature. We cannot look upon it as our heroic age. We are conscious that the whole period with which this book deals stands as a buffer between two epochs of great intellectual expansion, that it lacks alike the romantic colour of the Renaissance time, and the noble elevation of the nineteenth century mood. Yet who can say that we did not make invaluable progress? The triumph of Parliament, the establishment of a lasting constitution, the beginnings of a world-empire, the independence of America, the ferment which forewarned the French Revolution, were great happenings, and side by side with them we have Milton, Dryden, Pope, Burke, Johnson, Gibbon, setting themselves to no less pregnant work. In every respect it is true that the great work of the nineteenth century would have been impossible without the prosaic task-work of the eighteenth. No great writer will ever write badly again, either in prose or in poetry. And let us not forget that we have the novel as one of the eighteenth century bequests. Through Fielding and Smollett to Thackeray and Dickens, the eighteenth century shakes hands with the nineteenth.

NOTES

CHAPTER II

Browne of Tavistock William Browne (1591 ? 1643) was a native of Tavistock, in Devonshire, and the beautiful scenery of his home country inspired much of his poetry, the best of which is pastoral and descriptive. Spenser was his great model. His works include *Britannia's Pastorals* (1613-6), and a masque, *The Inner Temple Masque*, which was produced at court in 1620.

CHAPTER III

§ 3 **Theophrastus** (B.C. 394-288), whose original name was *Tyrtamus*, was a student of Plato's, and afterward received instruction from Aristotle. So warmly did the latter approve his excellence in speaking, that he made him take the name of *Euphrastus*, and yet again, as still more expressive of his elegant diction, *Theophrastus*. He succeeded Aristotle in the Lyceum, and attained the widest celebrity for his eloquence and wisdom. He wrote many treatises, of which about twenty are extant, including his *Characters*, a moral work begun in his 99th year. He died at the age of 106, in the year 288 B.C. His best follower was the Frenchman, La Bruyère (1645-96).

Sir Thomas Overbury (1571-1613) was one of the earliest writers in English of "Characters." His *Characters* first appeared in 1614, and their witty and epigrammatic descriptions of types made them very popular. Joseph Hall's *Characters of Virtues and Vices*, the first compositions of the kind in English, had already appeared (1608). Many imitations were to follow.

John Earle (? 1601-65) was a learned and eloquent divine, and a most amiable man of letters. His *Microcosmographie, or a Piece of the World discovered in Essays and Characters*,

appeared in 1628, and is, perhaps, the most famous of the character-writings of his century. Its wit and humour are exhaustless, the satire biting, the epigrams telling, whilst the descriptions seldom fail to hit the mark.

Martial (? A.D. 38-104) was a Roman poet in whom the very genius of epigrammatic versification resided. His gifts in improvisation of witty verse, his ready flattery, and his *bonne camaraderie* made him much in request by the society of his day, and he, too, freely humoured the weaknesses and vices of the times. His work reveals a true artist, and much of it has great finish. His pictures of the Rome of his day are vividly realistic, and have much of Hogarthian humour in them.

Democritus, a celebrated philosopher of Greece, died in B.C. 361, in the 109th year of his age. He travelled extensively in quest of knowledge, and such was his zeal for science, that he declared that he would rather be the discoverer of one of the causes of the works of nature than wear the diadem of Persia. He scorned those who consumed themselves with anxieties and cares, and laughed at the weaknesses and vanities of mankind. He is often spoken of as the Laughing Philosopher.

CHAPTER IV

§ 10 Copernican System The system of Copernicus (1473-1543) placed the sun at the centre of the planetary system. Ptolemy, a geographer of Alexandria, (c. 140 A.D.), taught the geocentric doctrine, and placed the earth at the centre of a series of concentric spheres.

William Chillingworth (1602-44) was a learned divine and zealous Royalist, famous for his controversial skill. This was developed by the necessity he felt of justifying his frequent changes of creed. His fame rests on his *Religion of the Protestants a safe way to Salvation* (1637). Clarendon speaks of him as a man of great subtilty of understanding, of rare temper in debate, and of a facility in argument "over all the men I ever knew."

Vondel (1587-1678) was a great Dutch poet. He wrote numerous plays, the most famous of which is *Lucifer* (1654), which in some measure suggests a parallel with Milton's *Paradise Lost*, on which some critics have based a supposition of indebtedness to Vondel by Milton.

Andreini was an Italian pastoral dramatist of the early seventeenth century. His *Adamo* had some suggestiveness for Milton's great poem.

Sylvester Joshua Sylvester (1553-1618) was a merchant, of wandering habits and some pretence as a poet. His works are now forgotten, but his translation of the *Divine Weeks and Works* of Du Bartas had great though brief popularity at the time. The poem of Du Bartas (1544-90), entitled *La Sepmaine*, gives an account of the Creation, and is thought by some to have been a source of inspiration for Milton's great poem.

CHAPTER V

§ 5 Mention ought to be made here of the writings of Sir William Temple, a diplomatist and a dabbler in culture (died 1699), and of the essays of the poet Cowley, which in their polished ease anticipated the essay of the eighteenth century.

CHAPTER VI

Sir Isaac Newton (1642-1727), the greatest of natural philosophers. In 1687 he published his famous *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica*, in which his theory of gravitation was given to the world.

§ 4 **Davenant** As a poet, Sir William Davenant is best remembered by his long and wearisome *Gondibert*, in which we have one of the first uses of the metre of Gray's *Elegy*.

§ 8 **Pierre Corneille** (1606-84) is the greatest writer of French tragedy, and he was the forerunner of the great school of French comedy, which had for its central figure Molière. His very great powers were, however, not permitted full play by the limitations of subject and methods to which he was subjected by allowing himself to be confined to the classical stage. His plays are modelled on those of Seneca, and do not permit that treatment of human character and passion which his poetic genius undoubtedly would have enabled him adequately to portray. *Le Cid* and *Polyeucte* are his typical plays.

Molière (1622-73) is the greatest comic dramatist of France. His strength lay in what is aptly described as "the Comedy of Manners." An astonishingly accurate observation, masterly control of language, and great powers of wit and satire, enabled him exactly to "hit off" the type of society he had for the moment in hand. Fresh as he was in his own day, he is as fresh and popular to-day—the best testimony to his truth to nature and perfection in art. *L'Avare*, *Le Misanthrope*, and *Les Précieuses Ridicules* are among his best comedies.

CHAPTER VII

La Calprenede A seventeenth century writer of romance His romances were very long but very popular, because they idealised contemporary personages in the guise of the great heroes of the past

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?-1400) is commonly spoken of as the father of English poetry, and he is among the greatest poets in the language His chief work is the *Canterbury Tales*, full of humour, grace, rich description, and nice characterisation In them we have an invaluable picture of the English society of his day

Henry Purcell (1658-95) is one of the most distinguished of English musicians His church music early obtained for him a wide celebrity, but his chamber music and dramatic compositions showed an even greater power Some of his songs, glees, and other popular pieces are favourites to this day He composed an opera, *Dido and Æneas*, at the age of seventeen, and, among other work wrote the songs for various dramas which Dryden wrote or in which he had a hand

CHAPTER IX

§ 2 **Boyle** The Hon Charles Boyle, an ambitious young man, entered into controversy with the classical critic, Bentley, concerning the genuineness of the *Epistles of Phalaris* Boyle, in supporting the Epistles, was backed up by the eloquent and witty Bishop Atterbury, his tutor "Indeed, Atterbury wrote most of the essay, and followed it with a second, which is, says Macaulay, "the best book ever written by any man on the wrong side of a question of which he was profoundly ignorant" Atterbury afterwards became bishop of Rochester, a friend of Pope, and a Jacobite intriguer

Bentley Richard Bentley (1662-1743) was the greatest pure scholar and critic of his time He demolished the case for the spurious *Epistles of Phalaris* (1699), and since his time Phalaris has ceased to exist This he did in face of the opposition of Temple, Swift, and Atterbury He was supported by William Wotton (1666-1726), and it was their united *Reflections upon Ancient and Modern Learning* that inspired Swift's brilliant skit

Deists the deists believed in a God, but generally refused to accept the revelation of God given by the life of Christ Among them was Anthony Collins (1676-1729), whose *Discourse*

Boileau (1636-1711) the predecessor of Pope in France, cleared out of French poetry all affectations, all incompetence, all excess. He propounds doctrines akin to Pope's in his *Art Poétique* (1674). In poetry only the true should be represented, the truth is only to be found in Nature by the application of the laws of Reason, and these laws are to be found best by studying the Classics. Boileau's defects are the same as Pope's. Nature does not mean Man alone—Man as he is in cities. Clearness, cold and precise, is not the one merit of poetry, which should "surprise by a fine excess." Boileau's influence was as powerful as Pope's—was equally valuable to his slipshod contemporaries—equally cramping to succeeding poets.

Roscommon (1633-84) Wentworth Dillon, Earl of Roscommon, wrote a clearly reasoned *Essay on Translated Verse*. His lighter verses gave him reputation but he is, not undeservedly, an exploded reputation now.

§ 4 The mania for writing ponderous epics was widespread in Pope's time. *The Creation*, by Sir Richard Blackmore (1650-1729), was highly praised by Addison, but Pope was right in seeing in this, as in a hundred similar compositions, an example of useless labour.

Pope's *Pastorals* are scarcely worth consideration now, they were the work, after all, of a mere boy, and, with all the artificial machinery of nymphs and swains, have none of the poetic charm of *Lycidas* in atonement for them. *Windsor Forest* (1713), an imitation of Sir John Denham's *Cooper's Hill*, is perhaps the best.

Abelard died as Abbot of Cluny in 1142. He was a theologian who had the misfortune to hold views too broad for his day.

§ 6 Bolingbroke The literary character of Henry St John, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), a political trickster and traitor who sought fame by setting up an ideal of a patriot king, is well condensed by Mr John Morley in his *Life of Walpole* — "He handled the great and difficult instrument of written language with such freedom and copiousness, such vivacity and ease, that in spite of much literary foppery and falsetto, he ranks in all that musicians call execution, only below the three or four highest masters of English prose. Yet of all the characters in our history, Bolingbroke must be pronounced to be most of a charlatan of all the writing in our literature, his is the hollowest, the flashiest, the most insincere." Yet his personality charmed all—inspired Pope. His style was not without influence on Burke.

Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), a witty and

accomplished woman of the world, whose clever, lively, and interesting letters give her a place, if a small one, in literature. She is satirised by Pope as Sappho, in the *Epistles*, and her behaviour was not always within the limits of the "proper."

Theobald Lewis Theobald (1688-1744) is the author of *Shakespeare Restored, or specimens of blunders committed or unamended in Pope's edition of the poet*, the title of which was enough to account for his position in *The Dunciad*.

Colley Cibber (1671-1757) was a volatile poet and dramatist who was quite careless of Pope's ridicule. He was a popular actor and playwright, and became one of our worst Poets Laureate. His best play is *The Careless Husband*, a sentimental comedy. Cibber was not above his time, his comedies have the coarse politeness of society in 1700. His *Apology* for his own life is interesting, and not without value.

§ 7 **William Warburton** (1698-1779) was a self-assertive and pompous bishop, who was more remarkable for loud noise than for solid thought. In his own time he was wittily described, mentally, as of monstrous appetite but bad digestion. He disclosed to Pope the orthodoxy of the *Essay on Man*, which had been widely doubted, he quite succeeded in gaining the poet's effusive respect and gratitude.

§ 8 **The Augustan Age**, corresponding roughly to the age of Augustus (B.C. 27-14 A.D.), produced many of the finest writers of Rome—Virgil, Horace, Livy, and many more. Augustus himself and other rich men, such as Mæcenas, were the influential patrons and friends of great writers. Queen Anne's time was only in an imperfect way England's Augustan Age.

§ 11 We may here add a note on **Allan Ramsay** (1686-1758), the genial and jovial forerunner of Burns in the recapture of Scotch songs and ballads. His collections, called *The Evergreen* and *The Tea-Table Miscellany*, are inferior, of course, to Burns' great lyrics, but they were good enough for Scott. *The Gentle Shepherd* (1725) is a tame pastoral, with a good deal of quiet rustic charm.

Charles Churchill (1731-64), a popular satirist, in whose metallic octosyllabic satire fell into eclipse, was esteemed a great poet by Cowper and everyone else, but the blaze of his vivid lines has long since died out. *The Rosciad* and *The Ghost* are his best known poems.

CHAPTER XII

§ 1 **Shenstone** William Shenstone (1714-64) was famous for his elaborate landscape garden at the Leasowes, Halesowen, in Worcestershire. One or two pretty pastoral ballads, and *The Schoolmistress* (1742), just remain in our poetic memories. The Spenserian stanzas of the latter are simple and smooth, but they cannot compare with those of *The Castle of Indolence*, which they preceded.

Armstrong John Armstrong (1709-79) was a physician, who is sufficiently treated when we say that he wrote *The Art of Preserving Health*, in Thomsonian blank verse.

Among other minor poets who may be mentioned here is **Mark Akenside** (1721-70), whose personal character and verses alike are frozen into a cold dignity which often calls for admiration, but never for enthusiasm. *The Pleasures of Imagination* (1744) is very serious and even severe in its deportment—remarkably fine, too, when the age of the writer is considered. *The Hymn to the Naiads* (1746) is rather too learned, but does not wholly repel. **John Dyer** (1698-1758) was highly esteemed by Gray, and his *Grongar Hill* (1726) has some excellent landscape-lines. But *The Fleece* (1757) is only occasionally felicitous. **William Falconer** (1732-69), a sailor, drowned at sea, is remembered by *The Shipwreck*, a faithful but not vital picture of sea life. **John Byrom** (1691-1763) was an exponent of mystical theology, an enthusiast for theology, an expert in shorthand, and an easy extempore rimer—but no poet. One happy epigram retains his name in literature.

God bless the King—I mean the faith's defender—
God bless (no harm in blessing!) the Pretender!
But who Pretender is, or who is King—
God bless us all!—that's quite another thing

§ 2 *The Song of David*, by Christopher Smart (1722-71), anticipates the prophetic tone of Blake. It was written in a madman's lucid interval, and is both fervent and poetical.

James Beattie (1735-1803) was famous in his day as a popular philosopher and critic of Berkeley and Locke, but he is now remembered for one poem, *The Minstrel* (1771), which is a faint anticipation of *The Prelude* of Wordsworth. It is long and tiresome, but the verse is at times good. The growth of the poetic mind from the dawn of its fancy up to its ripe prime is hazily treated, with but little psychological insight.

Robert Fergusson (1750-74), who died in a madhouse ere his poetic powers had really had time to ripen, was recognised by Burns as his "elder brother in the muses." In fact, he shows

very little of Burns' gift, but he has given us a number of true Scotch lyrics, the best of them in the favourite metre of Burns as this of his own muse

But she maun e'en be glad to nook
An' play teet bo' fae nook to nook,
Or blush as gill she had the yook
Upo' her skin,
When Ramsay, or whan Penntowk,
Their liltis begin

CHAPTER XIII

§ 2 Diderot's opinion of Richardson was only the most effusive of very many French attributes to his genius. He would place him on the same shelf as Moses, Homer, and Sophocles. He will see no spots on his sun. Voltaire was more critical, but Rousseau followed Richardson's method in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*. For some of the greatest French writers of the nineteenth century, such as George Sand and Alfred de Musset, *Clarissa* was the first novel in the world.

§ 6 *Gil Blas* This is the first great novel of manners in French. Its various volumes appeared between 1715 and 1735. Its hero, *Gil Blas*, is of the type dear to Fielding—a mixture of good-nature and weakness. His outlook on the world is essentially that of an interested human being, and no more. The author of *Gil Blas* was Alain-René Lesage (1668-1747), who gained his living by writing comedies for the theatre and tales for the public.

§ 7 Cervantes (1547-1616), one of the greatest names in European literature, and the greatest in Spanish, was in the service of the Spanish Government when he wrote his pastoral romance, *Galatea*, and a number of plays. But he was living in a humble garret in Seville, hiding from a charge of falsifying the public accounts, when he wrote *Don Quixote* (printed 1604), one of the great books of the world. It is a book for all ages and for all times. Its irony, its ingenuity of invention, its ever-changing adventure, compel the dullest and the gravest to laughter and delight. In it the affectations are annihilated, and the real worth of men exposed.

§ 8 Minor novelists The names of a few of these may be here noted. A very prominent figure in literary society during the eighteenth century was the Scotchman, Henry Mackenzie.

(1745-1831), who was highly thought of by Scott and by every one else. In one novel, *The Man of Feeling* (1771), he occasionally comes near to Sterne, whom he consciously imitates. But his powers of mind were not great enough to prevent his sentiment from becoming maudlin. John Moore, a follower of Smollett, became famous with an improbable tale called *Zeluco* (1786). Fielding's sister, Sarah, gained the praise of Richardson for her anonymously printed *Adventures of David Simple* (1744), a story much too dull to be read now.

Schwellenberg The chief keeper of the robes to the queen was a German woman, Mrs Schwellenberg. Miss Burney was her assistant, and has given a very witty account of her life at court, in her diary. Mrs Schwellenberg seems to have been a pompous, vulgar, and ungentle personage, who would have appealed strongly to "little Burney's" humour, if she had not been so crotchety and high-handed.

CHAPTER XIV

§ 2 **Voltaire's *Candide*** is a more sprightly and brilliant book than *Rasselas*, but the problem with which it deals is the same. Both works refute the theory of optimism, both appeared almost simultaneously. But, as Boswell says, "Voltaire meant only by wanton profaneness to obtain a sportive victory over religion, and to discredit the belief in a superintending Providence. Johnson meant, by showing the unsatisfactory nature of things temporal, to direct the hopes of man to things eternal." Boswell goes on to extol *Rasselas*, to declare that he is unhappy if he does not read it through at least once a year, and that "I can scarcely believe that I had the honour of enjoying the intimacy of such a man" (*ie* as Johnson).

§ 3 **Juvenal** (55-138 A.D.) lived through the reigns of Vespasian, Domitian, Trajan, and Hadrian, and in spite of the prosperity of Trajan's times, he found much in the condition of Rome and the Romans to provide him with material for the most pungent satires in literature. The vices of Rome were those of a wealthy and corrupt state, undermined by the unnameable habits of the East. The parasite and the informer held their paradise under a tyrant like Domitian; the literary man, the able man was snubbed. It is interesting that Juvenal probably served in Britain under Agricola.

§ 6 **The Journey to the Hebrides** was undertaken in 1773. Ninety four days were spent in the wildest parts of Scotland,

with Boswell as the patient guide Johnson made himself quite at home with the natives, and his book, published in 1774, shows that he observed much with the broad human sympathy which was his main characteristic

§ 8 The Bee was brought out by a publisher named Wilkes, in 1751 Only the contributions of Goldsmith have survived

§ 11 Samuel Foote (1720-77) was well known for his impersonations of well-known personages, for his abilities in satirical farce, and for a really ready wit, which shook the gravity of Johnson *The Mayor of Garratt* (1763) is a really comic farce in two acts—"a comedy in little," as Hazlitt says Every one was his enemy, but he always managed to joke away the natural recoil of his satire

George Colman (1732-94), with one play, *The Clandestine Marriage* (1766), kept the boards till well on in the nineteenth century As with Foote, farce was his stock-in-trade they stand for the expiring flames which rise sporadically from the ashes of the school of Congreve

Richard Cumberland (1732-1811) was a successful dramatist, and thought himself a great one *The West Indian* (1771) and *The Fashionable Lovers* (1779) are by no means unreadable But it is not these plays which will immortalise Cumberland He was the original of Sheridan's Sir Fretful Plagiary

§ 12 Thomas Sheridan, the dramatist's father, is mentioned several times in Boswell He was an actor and a teacher of elocution, whom Johnson praised only with many reservations The two men quarrelled when Johnson, hearing that Sheridan had been awarded a pension, said—"What! have they given *him* a pension? Then it is time for me to give up mine" But such opinion of the father did not injure the Dictator's enthusiastic welcome to the son's plays

§ 13 Laocoon This book, one of the masterpieces of literary criticism, was written by Lessing in 1766 Starting from the famous Greek sculpture-group, which represents Laocoon and his two sons struggling vainly with the serpents, Lessing deduces the laws of plastic Art, and then proceeds to compare the conditions of sculpture and painting with those of literary Art His analysis is most stimulating Lessing lived from 1729 to 1781 He gave much attention to the reform of the drama *Minna von Barnhelm*, and *Nathan der Weise* are great original dramas of his He wrote fables, tales, and theological polemics, and laid the foundation of a clear and workmanlike German prose.

Warren Hastings For an account of this remarkable man, a history of England must be consulted. Fanny Burney's account of the trial is too long to quote in full, but is too interesting to be omitted altogether. Prejudiced in favour of Hastings, she confesses that Burke's opening of the case and his statement of the facts made her feel that her cause was lost. But when he "proceeded to his own comments and declamation—when the charges of rapacity, cruelty, tyranny, were general, and made with all the violence of personal detestation, and continued and aggravated without any further fact or illustration, then there appeared more of study than of truth, more of invective than of justice, in short, so little of proof to so much of passion, that before I was aware of the declension of Mr Burke's powers over my feelings, I found myself a mere spectator in a public place, and looking all around it, with my opera-glass in my hand!"

§ 14 **The Reflections on the French Revolution** was written in reply to a sermon preached by a Unitarian minister named Richard Price, on the 4th of November 1789.

Tom Paine (1737-1808) had a varied career as American and citizen of the French Republic. His *Rights of Man* (1792) presents the case of the Revolution from a standpoint which Burke never saw, and his *Age of Reason* (1793-1807) is a vigorous skirmish in support of deism. Paine's English is remarkably forceful and clear, he is, perhaps, our best rational exponent of the wilder and anarchical aspects of the religious and political revolution which filled Burke with so much horror.

§ 15 **Junius** The case for Sir Philip Francis is very strong, and Macaulay declared that the evidence of handwriting only would convict him in any criminal case. Francis was employed in the office of the Secretary of State, and in the War Office. Junius was clearly familiar with the details of these offices. Francis was responsible for the notes on which the reprints of Chatham's speeches were made. Junius mentions that *he* too took such notes. Francis resigned his clerkship in the War Office out of resentment at the appointment of a certain Mr Chamier to the under-secretaryship, which appointment Junius attacks. Such pieces of circumstantial evidence as these leave us with Francis as the most likely candidate for the honour of wearing the mantle of Junius.

§ 16 **Beauclerc** Topham Beauclerc was a grandson of the Duke of St Albans, who was the son of Charles II and Nell Gwynne. This seems to have been one of his recommendations to Johnson, but he was, according to Boswell, a

man of real learning, and Johnson hoped to correct his wild habits by the aid of his better ones

Langton Bennet Langton was a Lincolnshire gentleman, also recommended to Johnson by the blue blood of Stephen Langton that ran in his veins. He was, in most of his views and in his attainments, a most congenial companion to the sage

Thrale Mr Thrale was a brewer and an M P, but, in spite of that, was also a great admirer—and an appreciative one—of Johnson's character. At his country house at Streatham, Johnson was a frequent visitor from 1765 until Mr Thrale's death in 1781. The wife of the brewer was also an agreeable and lively friend of Johnson's, and the centre of many entertaining incidents in Johnson's life (see Boswell, *passim*). She married an Italian music master, named Piozzi, and printed anecdotes of Johnson, most of them spicy, and many spiteful. Thus she says "He was the most charitable of mortals, without being what we call *an active friend*. Admirable at giving counsel, no man saw his way more clearly, but he *would not stir a finger* for the assistance of those to whom he was willing enough to give advice." Boswell has taken the trouble to contradict such stuff as this!

CHAPTER XV

§ 1 **Refutation of Berkeley** Boswell had observed to Johnson that, absurd as Berkeley's doctrine was, it was impossible to refute it. "I shall never forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it *thus*!'" This condenses the arguments of the common-sense school of philosophy—of Reid, for example—but does not refute Berkeley!

§ 5 **Bossuet (1627-1704)** is the French counterpart of Jeremy Taylor, but, in the fervour of his faith and the unstudied eloquence of his style, he is more like Bunyan. He was one of the Roman Catholic Church's most eloquent defenders.

Pascal Blaise Pascal (1623-62) gave to French literature one of its most widely known books. But the *Pensées* do not show the man, with his crushing power of satire, his Miltonic religious rigour. The *Lettres Provinciales*, written against the Jesuits, express the case against that misunderstood society with unanswerable force. Pascal was as nearly a Puritan as a Frenchman could be.

Voltaire (1694-1778), whose real name was François Arouet, was the representative of the sceptical, witty, and revolutionary spirit which characterised France in the eighteenth century. His fertility was as astounding as his merit, in so many and so various directions. His tragedies (e.g. *Édipe*, *Mérope*, *Zaïre*) are among the best of the classical type, his tales (e.g. *Zadig*, *Candide*) cannot be surpassed for condensed wit and irony, his short histories (e.g. *Charles XII*) are equally interesting and reliable. In life, he was a great influence without being an inspiration. His philosophy is condensed in the one sentence, *il faut cultiver son jardin*—one must cultivate his own garden.

Commodus, the son of Marcus Aurelius, began to reign in 180 A.D. He was in every respect unfit for empire, and the diseases which had been kept under during the reigns of the good emperors began to show themselves and to announce the dissolution of the empire.

§ 6 **La Rochefoucauld** (1613-80), a duke who mixed much in French politics, and has condensed his sinister wisdom into *Maximes*, which are distinguished by the chaste and cold perfection of their style as much as by their cynicism.

Madame de Sevigné (1627-97), a letter-writer, famous for the charming and delightfully observant personality which is revealed in the letters.

Science of the men of science mentioned here, **Joseph Black** was a teacher of chemistry in the universities of Glasgow and Edinburgh, discovered the principle of latent heat, and helped to promulgate the true theory of combustion. **Joseph Priestley** was a Unitarian preacher, a theological controversialist, a man of good and simple life who was driven to America by his revolutionary sympathies. His laboratory at Birmingham was destroyed by the mob in 1791, but he had discovered oxygen there in 1774. **Henry Cavendish**, a quiet plodding experimenter of the true scientific type, analysed the air in 1781, and discovered the true nature of water. **John Dalton**, the quaker-chemist of Manchester, with apparatus of the simplest character, laid the basis of modern chemical laws, and in *A New System of Chemistry* (1808) applied the theory of atoms to the laws of chemical combination.

Thomas Young, in his lectures at the Royal Institution, set the wave-theory of light on its permanent basis.

James Hutton laid the foundation of the science of geology in his *Theory of the Earth* (1785), by drawing attention to the destructive agents—wind, rain, etc., and the result of their work in denudation, river-erosion, and the like. To the insight of **William Smith** was revealed the true significance of fossils as

indices of the age of a rock stratum the geological scheme of stratified rocks began with him

Shaftesbury Antony Ashley, third Lord Shaftesbury (1671-1713), had a great contemporary reputation as a free-thinker and as a widely read man of the world. His *Characteristics* have a vague air of wisdom about them, but are merely clever and shallow, the careful language has very little solid thought behind it, and the moral sense which Shaftesbury sets up to justify virtue in the face of vice does not save the author from being a cynical and half-hearted deist.

Rousseau Jean Jacques Rousseau (1713-78) was a man of morbid and melancholy temperament, of weak hyper-sensitive nature, who, nevertheless, combined within himself more of the romantic spirit than any other single author. His was the unrestrained sentimentalism (in *La Nouvelle Héloïse*), his the worship of nature (*Emile*) and of democratic freedom (*Le Contrat Social*). He refused to be bound by conventions, literary or other. He indulged in the profuse method of Richardson, warmed by the glamour and warmth of romantic colour. In the true spirit of the romantic movement, he aspired to the unattainably beautiful—to the perfection which cannot be won, rather than to that cold and narrow perfection which study can yield.